THE POLITICS OF ORNAMENT

Modernity, Identity, and Nationalism in the Decorative Programmes of Selected South African Public and Commercial Buildings 1930 – 1940

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Declaration

I, Federico Freschi, declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Federico Freschi

This _____ day of _____ 2006

Abstract

This thesis interrogates the extent to which the façades of, and decorative programmes in, selected South African public and commercial buildings erected during the decade 1930 – 40 may be understood as important indexes of the various ideological, social and historical concerns underpinning the construction of an imaginary of national belonging during this period. In the context of rapid urbanisation, burgeoning industrialisation, and rampant capitalism that characterise the period, issues of nationalism and political power are brought into sharp relief, with three political agendas competing for dominance: Afrikaner nationalism at one extreme and British imperialism at the other, with, from 1933 to the end of the decade, the insipid 'South Africa First' nationalism of the Smuts-Hertzog 'fusion' government occupying a highly contested space somewhere between the two. I argue in this thesis that the rhetoric of 'unity in diversity' that informs the fusion politics of the 1930s, and particularly its expression in the decorative programmes of public buildings provides for a more nuanced reading of the political and cultural landscape of 1930s South Africa than has been the case to date, where the focus has tended towards deconstructing the cultural nationalism of the 1930s in terms of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. Moreover, it also serves as a compelling reference point against which to assess contemporary South African attempts to re-narrate notions of nationhood, and the extent to which difficult arguments around ethnicity, autochthony, and the construction of imaginary new 'publics' are articulated in post-apartheid public architecture.

Chapter 1 is a review of the literature that informs this thesis; both as regards the art historical discourse on South African inter-World War art and architecture, as well as theoretical issues arising from writing on nationalism, national identity, and the role that art and architecture plays in evolving the nation code. In Chapters 2 and 3, I consider the ways in which the notions of identity arising from fusion politics are played out in the decorative programmes

of two significant public buildings, South Africa House in London (1933) in Chapter 2 and the Pretoria City Hall (1935) in Chapter 3. I argue that both these buildings are classic examples of the manifestation in architectural terms of the hybrid identity being forged by the centrist 'South Africa first' ideologues, in so far as their decorative programmes express an uncomfortable alliance between the entrenched values of British imperialism and a burgeoning Afrikaner nationalism.

In Chapter 4, I contrast the decorative programme of the headquarters of the new Afrikaner insurance companies SANTAM and SANLAM (1932) with that of the new corporate headquarters of the Commercial Union Assurance Company (1932), a British owned firm that had had a presence in Cape Town since 1863. The differences in effect of the decorative programmes of these two buildings serve to illuminate the extent of the ideological posturing of *volkskapitalisme* and its construction of a 'modern African/Afrikaner' identity within the imperialist heartland of Cape Town. These debates are brought into sharp relief by the third example discussed in this chapter, the Old Mutual building (1940), the decorative programme of which effectively conflates these concerns with modernity and nationalism in order to construct a hybrid 'South Africanism' that neatly elides Boer and Brit imaginings.

In conclusion, I show in Chapter 5 how the post-apartheid South African situation presents an interesting case study in terms of constructing an imaginary of national belonging rooted in similar notions of 'unity in diversity'. Examples here include important national architectural commissions like the legislature buildings for the newly constituted provinces of Mpumalanga (1999) and the Northern Cape (2003), as well as the new Constitutional Court in Johannesburg (2004). In this chapter, I interrogate these debates, and conclude by pointing to parallels with the case studies from the 1930s. The post-1994 examples in question have been widely celebrated as exemplary of a new and appropriate response to the challenges of public building in democratic South Africa. I suggest, however, that the lessons of the 1930s should serve as a reminder that the ostensible dichotomy between 'good' (civic) and 'bad' (ethnic) nationalism is perhaps not as natural and obvious as it may appear, and that both are equally problematic.

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Architecture is politics with bricks and mortar. – Ulrich Beck (1998: 115)

INTRODUCTION

In his epic 1944 autobiography *Architecture and Personalities*, Herbert Baker – the undisputed, if unofficial, architect laureate of the British Empire – quotes his illustrious eighteenth-century counterpart Christopher Wren pronouncing on the political significance of public building:

> Architecture has its political Use: publick Buildings being the Ornament of a Country; it establishes a Nation, draws People and Commerce; makes the people love their native Country (Baker, 1944: 58).

Baker, of course, had his own reasons for embracing Wren's high-flown rhetoric, a point to which I shall return later in this thesis. For the moment, however, I should like to consider the implications, beyond the hyperbole, of Wren's statement and its relevance more than three centuries later.

What interests me about this assertion, and something that is generally overlooked in the extensive literature on the implicit politics of architecture,[1] is his notion of public building as 'ornament.' The public building, Wren seems to be saying, in addition to giving practical and symbolic shape to the machinery of bureaucracy, is in effect a ubiquitous form of public art. And like public art, public buildings inevitably raise complex questions around ownership and access, identity and power, while problematising, by their very existence, the abstracted notion of 'the public'. After all, as Michael Warner (2002: 8) reminds us, "publics exist only by virtue of their imagining. They are a kind of fiction that has taken on life, and very potent life at that." This thesis is concerned with material aspects of this imagining as it is projected onto the walls and into the spaces of

[1] Bevis Hillier (1996: 16 – 27) provides a useful definition of 'architecture' as both a "thing" and an "activity" and thus takes cognisance of both the physical, functional nature of built structures implied by the term, as well as the formal, aesthetic elements that the architect brings to bear on such structures.

buildings designed for their putative publics at two significant moments in South Africa's history, both of which are concerned with constructing an imaginary of 'unity in diversity': the 1930s and the first decade of post-apartheid democracy.

In buildings, the questions raised by this imagining are perhaps a little more pressing, since in buildings it is easy to conceal political subtext under the mantle of function: ornament, in effect, becomes 'naturalised' as part of the fabric of the building. No one, on the other hand, reasonably expects that public art should be useful in the same way as public buildings are (which partly explains why, when regimes change, statues topple while buildings remain standing). That these questions, in the context of public buildings, are often masked or mediated by the 'decorative', whether through the appearance of the actual structure or through the elaboration of the façade and other user-oriented aspects of the building, suggests to me that architectural ornament has the overwhelming potential of being inherently politicised.

This is, of course, implicit in Wren's statement: as part of the unspoken recognition of the role of architecture as public art, ornament was, until the twentieth century, the *sine qua non* of important buildings. It is only the modern movement's passionate (and, in retrospect, touchingly naïve) belief in the desirability of a blank slate onto which the utopian, socialist-inspired, values of the machine age might be inscribed that informed that century's highbrow suspicion of ornament. As the arch exponent of an architecture of *beinahe nichts*, Mies van der Rohe put it (echoing the rhetoric of his precursor, Adolf Loos, who suggested in 1908 that "ornament is crime"), "ornament is dangerous precisely because it dazzles us and tempts the mind without proper reflection" (*cit.* Gombrich, 1979: 17).

For both Loos and Mies (and, *mutatis mutandis*, for the generations of earnest architectural visionaries that they spawned) the danger of ornament lay in the threats it posed both to the utopian purity (for Loos) of the workers' revolution and the crystalline purity (for Mies) of the machine aesthetic. I contend, however, that while their motivations may be outdated, the implicit problems that they identify remain. Architectural ornament is potentially 'dangerous' precisely because large public buildings, given their implied – if misleading – sense of permanence and inevitability, have such an overwhelming potential to shape the imaginary of 'the public' whose interests they serve and whose cultural

values they seek to represent or, more likely, to construct. It is the fraught nature of this shaping that this thesis ultimately addresses. To Lawrence Vale's (1992: 3) assertion then that we can "learn much about a political regime by observing closely what it builds," I would add that we could gain substantial insight into a political regime's ideological agenda by scrutinizing how it *decorates* what it builds. Enormous and inescapable, the public-building-as-public-art has extraordinary potential to embed political and cultural values; to turn fraught geo-political 'space' into the unified 'place' of nationhood, as much through its entrenched social, symbolic and ceremonial values, as by the cultural and social values that informs its appearance.

Lawrence Vale (1999: 396) also offers a useful theoretical framework for understanding how national identity is constructed (or "buttressed", as he puts it) in architectural terms. He suggests that three impulses underlie this process: first, the need of the sponsoring regime to reassert a sub-national identity by equating its ethnic heritage with 'the national'; second, its need to extend this identity into the international realm by means of some kind of "noteworthy modernity"; and third the need to develop the personal identity of the client or designer. Certainly, all three of these elements are present to a greater or lesser extent in the examples that I shall be discussing. Louw and Louw's SANTAM/SANLAM Building (1933) in Cape Town, for instance, is a clear example (discussed in Chapter 4) of the application of all three principles in the architectural expression of pre-Second World War Afrikaner Nationalist ideals. Not only does it conflate the Afrikaner sub-national identity with a broader 'African' identity by means of the use of regional materials and iconographic references, but it does so within a self-consciously 'modernist' style. These combined forces in turn establish the Louws as exemplary *volksargitekte*, whose engagement on any subsequent projects would carry the tone of the highest moral authority; for example, in their various designs for Dutch Reformed churches, homes of prominent Afrikaners, and, not least, in their collaboration with Gerhard Moerdijk, the quintessential *volksargitek*.

Vale's model can equally be applied to other examples of corporate and civic architecture under discussion: For instance, Louw and Louw's and F. M. Glennie's Old Mutual buildings (Cape Town, 1940); Herbert Baker's South Africa House in London (1933); J. Lockwood Hall's Pretoria City Hall (1935); Luis

Ferreira da Silva's Northern Cape Legislature (2003), to name some of the examples discussed in subsequent chapters. All of the above are informed, in one way or another, by the need to reinforce given political agendas by creating a symbolic language of form, ostensibly in the pursuit of celebrating the ideals of a national South African identity.

Vale's model thus provides a useful framework for understanding how and why architecture enters into discourses of power, but in turn begs an important question. How is it possible to speak, both theoretically and empirically, of identities being 'constructed' through such discourses; or, to put it differently, to what extent does exposure to symbolic representations inform identification with a given social imaginary? This question is, of course, fundamental to any enquiry of this kind and leads to a second theoretical approach, one that centres on the notion of subjectivity in the reception and interpretation of public art, and its relation to the broader rubric of Benedict Anderson's thesis of the nation as an 'imagined' community. Dan O'Meara (1997: 4) points out a fundamental problem of agency, or how exactly an entire community can 'come to' adopt the kind of identities constructed for it. This idea nonetheless provides a valuable point of departure for investigating the ways in which the popular 'imagination' can be informed and/or manipulated by its (re)presentation in terms of public art and architecture.

While the primary motivation behind the production and dissemination of such discourses is, as Marxist theorists have shown, political and thus inextricably bound to notions of power, its reception cannot always be explained or understood purely in terms of politics and economics. Taking a leaf out of post-structuralist theory I contend that the imagined identification happens at a level of subjective engagement with the text, in this case, the decorative programmes, which inevitably comes to assume meanings and interpretations beyond the intentions or expectations of its author and which, in this context, can be extended to include its patron. Tagg (1992: 356) provides a useful summary of this fluidity of meaning when he suggests that "there are only contexts without any centre of absolute anchoring."

In these terms, one can refer to Murray Edelman's (1995: 86) cogent reading of the symbolic value of buildings and spaces in communicating political power and constructing notions of identity. He argues:

> Clearly, spaces do not themselves create self-conceptions or perceptions of others, but rather simplify and intensify beliefs and perceptions that already exist. In doing so, they inevitably select from among the possibilities to which every person is susceptible.

Thus, by highlighting the notion of subjectivity in the imagined identification with constructs of history and nationality as expressed in architectural ornament of the period in question, I problematise conventional notions of what makes certain social groupings arrive at a perceived consensus about who they are and how they relate to each other.

Although my theoretical focus is located primarily within established discourses both of nationalism and of the reception and interpretation of public art, I shift the focus to the somewhat marginalised area of the 'decorative'. In these terms, I contend that architectural ornament[2] – far from being merely an elaboration of the appearance of the building for "the sake of visual pleasure" (Trilling, 2001: 6) – is in fact central to the way in which a building can become a carrier of social meaning. Implicit in my engagement with decorative programmes is the contention that decoration plays a significant role in the construction and experience of the visual fabric of the built environment. As such, it has two important functions: First, since urban experience is largely predicated on, and shaped by, visual experience, the entanglement and interface of the particular kind of visual project exemplified by the decorated public building with political and social agendas is an ineluctable part of the construction of an imaginary of 'belonging'. Second, it further complicates arguments around notions of 'space' and 'place' that are not only fundamental to any reading of architecture, but indeed the Holy Grail of nationalism.

Although space, at least in architectural terms, can be defined in physical terms by the planes that enclose it, it is essentially formless, the literal absence of the ineffable presence that is ultimately defined by use, habit, and history. Having acquired these things, the apathetic void of *space* becomes *place*, specific and subjective, and the definition of self acquires the external referents of temporality and location by which it can measure its relationship to the world around it. Ostensibly innocuous, certainly unthreatening (these ideas, after all,

[2] I use the term 'architectural ornament' (sometimes interchangeably with 'decorative programme') in its widest possible sense to include any and all applied, built, or otherwise integrated elements, including freestanding and/or fixed artworks, that contribute to the overall aesthetic effect of a building.

are implicit in the very definitions of 'decoration' and 'ornament' as essentially superfluous; indulgent afterthoughts to the serious business of structure), architectural ornament nonetheless provides fixed points of reference for the ways in which a building connects with notions of place. In this way, ornament inevitably enters into the complex debate around the beliefs and perceptions that constitute citizens' real or imagined longing for the tangible proof of identity, of being in the world, which is afforded by the fantasy of an inalienable sense of place. Thus, while one might well agree with William Kentridge's cynical observation that "decoration [of South African public spaces] is fine, but it's not transforming anything" (*cit.* Garson, 2004), I would argue that a critical awareness of the implicit politics of ornament can complicate our readings of the nature and function of public architecture. In effect, such an awareness allows for a more nuanced, less reductive approach to unpacking complicated arguments (particularly in the South African context) about ethnicity, autochthony, and the repetitive figuring of imaginary new 'publics' in pursuit of notions of national identity. As such, it has an important role to play in articulating and problematising the dynamics of socio-political interactions in South African visual culture.

Proceeding from this understanding, what follows is an interrogation of the extent to which the façades of, and decorative programmes in, selected South African public and commercial buildings erected during the decade 1930 – 40 may be understood as important indexes of the various ideological, social, and historical concerns underpinning the construction of notions of national identity during this period. As the most visible emblems of urbanisation and the ubiquitous symbols of economic and political power, socially significant buildings – then as now – were to play a vital role in articulating the nation code in both the public as well as the private sphere. More significantly for this thesis, however, is the fact that, in a time before television, the walls of public buildings provided ubiquitous and well-appointed spaces into which notions of how national belonging might be imagined could be projected for a captive audience of citizens. In addition, buildings have a kinaesthetic advantage over television and other two-dimensional media since they are more than just a screen onto which images are projected. The physical act of entering a public building, of negotiating its points of access and interpreting, however subliminally, the visual

points of reference implied by its decorative programme, implies a significant level of corporeal engagement with its implicit or explicit social meanings. The literal space of the building assumes for the moment the imagined place of nationhood, and the visitor is granted the vicarious thrill – whether innocent or fraught – of what it might mean to 'belong'.

Historical context

The patterns of urbanisation and burgeoning industrialisation that characterise the 1930s served to establish the social, economic, and political framework for the subsequent development of notions of a modern South African state. Two additional issues arise from this assertion, one relating to architectural history, the other political. Since both these issues are fundamental to this thesis, it is worth considering them in some detail.

In terms of architectural history globally, the 1930s represents a consolidating phase in modernity. Driven practically by advances in industrial production and ideologically by the disruptive social and political changes wrought by the First World War, the universalising tendencies of the European modern movement, underscored by a utopian belief in the transformative power of the machine, become entrenched during this period. Consequently, the beaux arts principles of design – usefully, if somewhat expediently described as devolving around symmetrical planning behind a symmetrical, classically decorated façade – that had held sway for the best part of the early modern period were abandoned. In their place the vanguard architects of the day began advocating open, asymmetrical planning behind exteriors that were not so much façades as a (largely transparent) insulating skin that exposed selectively, like a machine's casing, the inner workings of the structure. In time, what had seemed like a radical departure from the traditional understanding of the appearance and function of buildings was to become common currency; a true 'international style' emerged that, by the 1970s, had irrevocably united the cities of the world in a grim confraternity of jerry-built concrete and glass. In the 1930s, however, the pendulum still swung wildly between 'tradition' (that is, classicism) and 'modernity' (that is, the machine aesthetic) and settled, for the most part, on something in between. This style, expediently (if problematically) referred to as

'art deco,'[3] embraced the decorated façade as a necessary condition, but tempered in its details with an awareness of the machine aesthetic and all that it represented in terms of its faith in the progressive nature of science and technology.

In terms of the South African architectural scene, this collision of modernity and tradition is particularly fraught, both in stylistic as well as broader cultural terms. On the one hand, the notion of an architectural 'tradition' was itself highly problematic and clearly divided across Dutch and British colonial antecedents. On the other, the accelerated pace of urban development in the wake of the abandoning of the gold standard in 1932 and the concomitant economic upsurge meant an increased pressure on the volume of buildings in the urban centres. These buildings in turn communicated the optimistic mood of the period and the opportunistic interest in novelty for its own sake, as well as for its commercial value. (This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 in relation to the politics of selected examples of commercial architecture of the period.) In terms of this thesis, I argue that the resulting tension between 'modernity' and 'tradition' has its political dimension. While, as we shall see, it increasingly became necessary for the government of the time to promote an image of modernity and progress in its landmark public buildings, by the same token it was often politically expedient to couch this in terms of the legitimating power of history and tradition.

Thus, while the 1930s has been characterised as a 'Heroic Period' in South African architecture, where, according to Hanson (Martin, 1994: 10) "[i]n terms of general populations, South Africa could show more good representative buildings of the International Style than any other country in the world", for the most part the incipient conservatism of the colonial context prevented clients and architects alike from opting for the alarming minimalism of Le Corbusier's *machines à habiter*. These might well have expressed the vaunted *Esprit Nouveau* of the mechanical age, but were no guarantee of lettability, and therefore potentially

[3] In general usage the term 'art deco' seems to denote an historically expedient 'period' concept rather than any single stylistic phenomenon associated with the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris from which the term was derived in the 1960s. In terms of South African architectural history the term is, however, normatively (if not specifically) applied to buildings erected during the 1930s and which show the typically 'modernistic' applied decorative details of the period, as separate from the 'modern movement' buildings, which show an absence of ornament, structural asymmetry, and a utopian concern with functionalism. It is in this sense that I use the term, with particular emphasis on the subtext of 'modernity'.

self-defeating in the prevailing spirit of exuberant capitalism. The 'reactionary modernism' of art deco, on the other hand, clearly paid lip service to urban bourgeois concepts of modernity, progress and capitalist self-consciousness, and thus emerged as the prevailing modernism of the decade.[4]

In fact, the bulk of South African buildings associated with the art deco style were erected between 1931 and 1939, at least half a decade after it had become common currency in the United States and, to a lesser degree, in Europe. This is due partly to a pervasive conservatism amongst local mainstream architects, critics and designers, and partly to the stifling atmosphere of colonialism. The August 1925 edition of *Architect, Builder and Engineer*, for example, commenting on the pavilions at the Paris Exposition which were to serve as prototypes for the stylistic language of the next decade, disparaged the

> wildness of their forms and the extreme ugliness of the general composition [which] is so marked that one cannot imagine a person of taste being attracted to such a *congeries* of architectural horrors as now disgrace the neighbourhood of the Quai d'Orsay … [b]y no stretch of the imagination can any of them be called beautiful.

Within a decade, however, these 'architectural horrors' were to become the stylistic norm in South Africa; an unequivocal expression of urban self-consciousness and of the desire to articulate an ostensible cosmopolitanism in the vocabulary of modernism.

In political terms, issues of nationalism and political power are brought into sharp relief against this backdrop of urbanisation, industrialisation and rampant capitalism. In this context, three dominant agendas compete for political, economic, and cultural dominance: Afrikaner Nationalism at one extreme and British Imperialism at the other, with, from 1933 to the end of the decade, the insipid 'South Africa First' nationalism of the Smuts-Hertzog coalition government occupying a highly contested space somewhere between the two. The centrist politics, and the imagining of a nation 'united in diversity' that constituted the ideological backbone of this fusion government, is of particular interest. Much ink has been spilled on the construction of Afrikaner nationalism

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[4] It is precisely this emphasis on 'modernity' that informs some of the other appellations by which the art deco style is known, *e.g.* the '*Style Moderne*', 'Depression Modern', 'Streamline Moderne', 'Moderne', *etc*. See Richard Guy Wilson's advocacy of the term 'moderne' (in Wilson *et al*, 1986: 149 – 182) for 'machine age' architecture in the United States. "The moderne, or the decorated machine-as-parts approach," he writes, "advertised modernism, and from skyscrapers to movie theaters it brought Americans the promise of a machine-made future" (Wilson *et al*, 1986 (2001): 167). The same might well be said of contemporary South Africa.

and its effects in the visual arts during this period (some of these issues are discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to the notion of *volkskapitalisme* and the impact of that ideology on the headquarters of SANLAM, the first *bona fide* Afrikaner corporation). The existence, however, of the equally compelling imaginary of 'fusion' politics (as the era of this coalition government is generally known) – and in particular how it was played out in the visual arts – has been at best subsumed under the broader project of deconstructing Afrikaner nationalist history, or at worst simply overlooked. I suggest in Chapters 2 and 3 that the rhetoric of 'unity in diversity' that informs the fusion politics of the 1930s, and particularly its expression in the decorative programmes of public buildings, provides for a more nuanced reading of the political and cultural landscape of 1930s South Africa. Moreover, it also serves as a compelling reference point against which to assess contemporary South African attempts to re-narrate notions of nationhood.

Then (as now) the constantly reiterated sentiment in these decorative programmes was the acknowledgement and tolerating of cultural difference without representing it as 'other', against the construction of a history of strenuous struggle and adversity. Of course, both the medium and the target audience have changed. The glowing images of the 'Rainbow Nation' associated with this sentiment are now beamed into South African homes *via* government-sponsored television advertisements rather than painted on the walls of public buildings. The presumed audiences are also South Africans of all colours and creeds rather than only the 'two races' of South Africa acknowledged by the white hegemonic politics of the 1930s, the 'Boers and Brits'. The inherent message, however – and, by extension, its inherent problems – nonetheless remains startlingly similar. As Owen Jones reminds us in Proposition 36 of his *Grammar of Ornament* (1865: 8), "the principles discoverable in the works of the past belong to us; not so the results. It is taking the end for the means."

I argue, then, that the decorative programmes of large-scale public and commercial buildings are of particular significance in terms both of inventing and of entrenching various notions of white South African nationhood during the decade in question. My argument is informed by recent theories of nationalism that follow from Benedict Anderson's (1983) understanding of nations as 'imagined communities', usefully summarised by David Cannadine (2002: 3) as

> depending for their credibility and identity both on the legitimacy of government and the apparatus of the state, and on invented traditions, manufactured myths and shared perceptions of the social order that are never more than crude categories and oversimplified stereotypes.

As instruments of propaganda in the service of powerful political and commercial organisations, landmark buildings provided a highly visible arena in which notions of identity could be constructed to suit the ideological agendas of their patrons. Moreover, historical events and social identities could be freely (re)constructed or invented in their decorative programmes in order to legitimise existing or nascent power bases. I term the ideological complexities underlying this construction of an imaginary of national belonging in the decorative programmes of public buildings the 'politics of ornament', and explore them further in this thesis.

Chapter 1 is a review of the literature that informs this thesis; both as regards the art historical discourse on South African inter-World War art and architecture, as well as theoretical issues arising from writing on nationalism, national identity, and the role that art and architecture plays in evolving the nation code. In this chapter, I also engage questions of style and examine the debates around classicism, regionalism, and modernism in the 1930s. The individual manifestations of these debates were advocated, each in turn, and to the exclusion of the others, by different stakeholders as the only possible starting point for a truly national architecture. The chapter concludes by showing how these debates around style subsequently informed the construction of potent cultural stereotypes in the iconography of architectural decorative programmes.

Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to specific case studies explicating in detail the broad principles outlined in Chapter 1. In these chapters, I consider the ways in which the notions of identity arising from fusion politics are played out in the decorative programmes of two significant public buildings: South Africa House in London (1933) in Chapter 2 and the Pretoria City Hall (1935) in Chapter 3. I argue that both these buildings are classic examples of the manifestation in architectural terms of the hybrid identity being forged by the centrist 'South Africa first' ideologues, in so far as their decorative programmes express an uncomfortable alliance between the entrenched values of British imperialism and a burgeoning Afrikaner nationalism.

The subject of Chapter 2, South Africa House, is particularly interesting in this regard. Although it is, strictly speaking, outside of the geographical ambit of this thesis (and the building is, in fact, only on lease to the South African government), its location on Trafalgar Square along with other 'empire houses' placed it unequivocally in the literal and symbolic heart of the British imperialist establishment. This prime location also ensured that it enjoyed a highly visible and international platform from which notions of a South African cultural identity could be promoted. In the context of the 1930s, it may, therefore, to all intents and purposes be considered a South African building. Indeed, this point was not lost on L. Cumming-George (1934: 21), who, in his second volume of *Architecture in South Africa* (see Chapter 1) published as a frontispiece a drawing of South Africa House, and noted

> [t]hat South Africa house in London belongs to this country – is definitely ours in design and purpose – is accepted by all. It has also revealed the riches and wonders of South Africa to the world – for the world visits London.

The fact that South Africa House opened in the same year in which the Smuts/Hertzog coalition came into being is thus, as I argue in this chapter, doubly significant. It meant that the building, given its symbolic status, inevitably not only entered into a complex dialectic between the competing aims of imperialism and nationalism, but also became a symbolic expression of the ostensible desire for the unity of the 'two races', the Boers and the Brits. As Cumming-George (1934: 21) put it, "to South Africans when travelling [South Africa House] has meant a wider opened door and a feeling of fellowship which we who love both countries desire intensely to promote." Chapter 3 extends this inquiry into the complex construction of 'South Africanism' in the Pretoria City Hall, an example that is closer to home, and thus more directly geared towards a South African public *per se*.

Chapter 4 considers the extent to which the tensions of 'modernity' and 'tradition' are played out in the decorative programmes of significant commercial buildings in the 1930s. On the one hand, the self-conscious 'modernity' that characterises these examples celebrates the mood of rampant capitalism that partly characterised the era of fusion politics. On the other, notions of corporate identity are reified by adopting a rhetorical, nationalistic and historicist iconography in their façades and decorative programmes. I show how the styles that evolved out of this mood of self conscious modernity, the so-called 'art deco'

architecture, became an unequivocal expression of the desire of the country's economic and cultural centres to articulate a self-conscious capitalist identity both within an accessible framework of modernity. At the same time, it enabled these buildings and their patrons to pay lip service to a sense of national belonging.

This chapter considers examples of commercial buildings in Cape Town, in different ways the 'Mother City' for both the Afrikaner and English constituencies, and the historic heartland of British Imperialist capitalist hegemony. By the early 1930s, a small but increasingly powerful group of Afrikaner entrepreneurs in the Cape formulated the concept of *volkskapitalisme* – the drive to make Afrikaners masters of their own economic destiny by taking control of South African capitalism – in order to further the aims of Afrikaner nationalism. I contrast the decorative programme of the headquarters of Afrikaner insurance companies SANTAM and SANLAM (two of the first large-scale corporations to demonstrate the power of *volkskapitalisme*) with that of the new corporate headquarters of the Commercial Union Assurance Company, a British-owned firm that had had a presence in Cape Town since 1863. The differences in effect of the decorative programmes of these two buildings – exact contemporaries, both built for insurance companies and both surprisingly and self consciously 'modern' in their effect – serves further to illuminate the extent of the ideological posturing of *volkskapitalisme* and its construction of a 'modern African' identity within the imperialist heartland of Cape Town. These debates are brought into sharp relief by the third example discussed in this chapter, the Old Mutual building (1940), the decorative programme of which effectively conflates these concerns with modernity and nationalism in order to construct a hybrid 'South Africanism' that neatly elides Boer and Brit imaginings.

In conclusion, Chapter 5 shows how the contemporary South African situation presents an interesting case study in terms of constructing an imaginary of national belonging rooted in similar notions of 'unity in diversity.' Given the global context of identity-based, post-nationalist politics in which democratic South Africa was born, it is quite understandable that the current government has not chosen large-scale public buildings as a preferred means of re-branding nationalism. Instead, and in keeping with non-essentialist notions of identity

promoted by post-modern social theorists and philosophers,[5] it has for the most part simply appropriated the grandiose piles of the *ancien régime*, papered over or removed the more odious reminders of the past, and invented hybrid traditions to fit the hybrid spaces. However, the implicit drive towards asserting a 'new' South African identity based on the need to recognise and celebrate cultural and ethnic diversity without representing it as 'other', has meant that the exceptions to this rule nonetheless bring into sharp relief debates around the role of public art and architecture in the construction of national identity. Examples here include important national architectural commissions like the legislature buildings for the newly constituted provinces of Mpumalanga (1999) and the Northern Cape (2003), as well as the new Constitutional Court in Johannesburg (2004).

I interrogate these debates in this chapter, and conclude by pointing to parallels with the case studies from the 1930s. The post-1994 examples in question have been widely celebrated as exemplary of a new and appropriate response to the challenges of public building in democratic South Africa. I suggest, however, that the lessons of the 1930s should serve as a reminder that the ostensible dichotomy between 'good' (civic) and 'bad' (ethnic) nationalism is perhaps not as natural and obvious as it may appear, and that both are equally problematic.

Finally, it is important to note that this thesis, like the writing of any history, is characterised as much by its exclusions as by what it engages. I do not claim, therefore, to provide an exhaustive account of the decorative programmes in South African public and commercial buildings of the period. I have been guided in the decisions of what to include by two considerations. First, I have engaged with examples that, while they are well known, have not enjoyed much critical attention in the historiography of South African art and architecture. This partly explains the absence of notable relevant examples, like, for example, the headquarters of the Anglo American Corporation (1939) at 44 Main Street, Johannesburg (which Clive Chipkin (1997) admirably engages in his *Johannesburg Style*), or Moerdijk's Merensky Library (1935), arguably the most important architectural statement of Afrikaner nationalism in the inter-World

[5] See, for example, Habermas (1989), as well as Derrida (1994) in a rare discussion of architecture, *et al.*

War period. I have also omitted discussion of other relevant commissions given both to the artists whose work I discuss (Coert Steynberg, for example, was particularly prolific during this decade), as well as others, like Mary Stainbank (who produced a great deal of decorative sculpture for public buildings, predominantly in Kwa-Zulu Natal during the 1930s) whom I do not engage. As regards these omissions, I trust that I have demonstrated sufficient theoretical and methodological principles that might serve as a reference point for further examinations of their work.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, I have focused on those examples that, to my mind, most clearly engage with the debates around national belonging and the imaginary of 'unity in diversity' that inform this thesis. In this respect, I hope again that I have demonstrated sufficiently certain guiding principles that might be applied to future readings of some of the examples that I have not engaged, which, in this way, are omnipresent by their absence. A case in point is the Johannesburg General Post Office (1935), whose extensive decorative programme – which I engage briefly in my discussion of the Pretoria City Hall in Chapter 3 – has thus far managed to survive relatively intact the ravages of changing bureaucratic regimes, and certainly merits comprehensive analysis before it succumbs to the inevitability of bureaucratic indifference.

I confirm that this is wholly my own work, and that any errors or omissions are mine alone.

A note on language usage

In the course of writing this thesis the capital city formerly known as Pretoria was, amidst much political wrangling, renamed Tshwane. For the sake of historical consistency, however, I have retained references to Pretoria. I use the term 'fusion politics' (without inverted commas, except in the initial reference) throughout to refer to both the policies as well as the socio-political imaginings of the Smuts/Hertzog coalition government of 1933 – 1940. Architectural styles have not been accorded the status of proper nouns, except where they appear thus in directly quoted sources.

Architecture has had, and continues to have, a vital role in shaping the social imagination, in helping us recognize the society in which we live. – Paul Jones (2003: 301)

CHAPTER ONE: Nationalism, modernism, art and architecture

It is something of an historical commonplace that the construction of great public buildings has always been closely allied to the construction of political identity. In the modern era, public buildings, like the grandiose monuments that were their natural corollary, expounded for nascent nation states the cultural and historical virtues and triumphs of nationhood, and thus aided in creating out of fraught geo-political 'space' the unified 'place' of nationhood. Recent commentators (see for example Delanty and O'Mahony, 2002; Delanty and Jones, 2003) have shown, however, how, in the context of increasing post-nationalism in the developed, post-modern world, this link between architecture and nationalism is no longer as clear as it once may have been. Architecture is increasingly open to different forms of codification and in effect has become "an open space in which many conflicting projects struggle" (Delanty and O'Mahony, 2002: 172).

In order to understand the implications of this 'open space' on current debates around the role of public architecture and nation building in contemporary South Africa it is necessary to understand two things: first, the ways in which notions of nationalism and identity have been debated and (de)constructed in recent literature; and second the ways in which notions of South African identity expressed in architectural terms have been engaged historically. This chapter considers both these issues by providing a brief summary of important trends in writing on nationalism over the past three decades, with specific reference to the ways in which nationalism and culture intersect. It then considers the ways in which these ideas have informed writing on constructions of South African identity in the arts.

The literature that informs this thesis can be divided broadly into two categories. First, there is a large (and growing) body of work dealing with the

broader historical issues pertaining to, or arising from, the social, economic and political context of South Africa in the 1930s. Of particular relevance to this thesis are those works dealing with notions of nationalism and cultural identity both in a broader international context, as well as specifically with South Africa in the 1930s. The second category is the literature dealing with the ideological underpinnings of art in the public domain and, more specifically, how notions of 'modernity' in turn affect these during the inter-World War period. I discuss the literature in this second category in terms of that which deals with notions of identity, nationalism and ideology in art and architecture from an international perspective, as well as that dealing with South African art and architectural history of the period (a considerably less populated category).

1.1 Nationalism and national identity

The literature on nationalism and notions of national identity is vast and complex, and I have tried to limit my review here only to those texts that are of specific relevance to this thesis. Nonetheless, no review of the subject of nationalism would be complete without reference to some of the more influential texts on the subject published during the past two decades. First amongst these, Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) provides a cogent analysis of the complex inter-relationship between the forces of modernisation and nationalism in urbanised societies. In effect, his is a theoretical understanding of nationalism that gained currency during the 1960s,[1] and which has since come to inform most writing on the subject. In his 1990 text *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (a reprint of the the Wiles Lectures given at the Queen's University of Belfast in 1985), for example, Eric Hobsbawm was to build his entire thesis on the construction of nationalism around the notion that "[t]he basic characteristic of the nation and everything with it is its modernity" (Hobsbawm, 1990: 14). Central to Gellner's thesis is the notion that structural changes wrought in society by the Industrial Revolution were largely conditioned by changing power relations brought about by the shift from an agrarian to an industrialised society. Nationalism as it began to appear in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe must thus be understood largely as an ideology

[1] See, for example, Kedourie (1960), Kohn (1962), Gellner (1964), and Kemiläinen (1964)

generated by the newly wealthy and urbanised middle classes to further their economic objectives and political domination.

This notion of the inter-relationship between the economic and social transformations wrought by industrialisation (that is, 'modernity') and the perceived need to legitimise the resultant social constructs in terms of a nationalistic polity has proved to be highly influential. Although Gellner sees nationalism as socially determined, his thesis is largely informed by his earlier observation, in *Thought and Change* (1964: 168), that "[n]ationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it *invents* nations where they do not exist" (my emphasis).[2] Gellner casts this 'inventing' of nationhood in a negative light, effectively equating it with 'fabrication' and 'falsity' (and thus – problematically – implying the existence of *de facto* communities that can be favourably contrasted to nations). However, most writing on the subject of nationalism, at least since the 1980s, has proceeded from a point of critical engagement with this notion of the nation being 'invented' and historically constructed, rather than being the immutable, 'natural' entity that nationalist ideologues would have it be.

Extrapolating from this, Anthony D. Smith, in *National Identity* (1991: 91 – 92) suggests that nationalism, although primarily a political force, is inseparable from culture:

> More than a style and doctrine of politics, nationalism is a *form of culture* – an ideology, a language, mythology, symbolism and consciousness – that has achieved global resonance, and the nation is a type of identity whose meaning and priority is presupposed by this form of culture.

He continues by suggesting that the arts have a vital role to play, "directly or evocatively," in reconstructing the ideals of nationalism for a wide audience. "Who," he asks, "more than poets, musicians, painters and sculptors, could bring the national ideal and disseminate it among the people?" (Smith, 1991: 92).

The implicit link between the promotion of 'culture' and the development of a widely shared sense of national identity is persuasively and influentially argued by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983, revised and enlarged in 1991, reprinted 1996). He posits that the concept of the 'nation' must be understood as highly subjective cultural representation through which people come to 'imagine' a shared

[2] In a similar vein, Elie Kedourie argued in 1960 that "[n]ationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century" (Kedourie, 1960: 1).

experience of identification with a culturally defined community. In this context, the term 'imagined' is not used in Gellner's sense of a falsely fabricated entity, but rather to express the link between individuals – unknown to each other – who come to create a belief in a collective identity through a shared sense of culture, history and kinship.

Anderson assigns an important role in the political and ideological construction of nationalism to the inter-relatedness of print-capitalism, language, and the interests of the intelligentsia in the development of texts, and so points to the importance of the study of print texts in examining specific forms of nationalism. In these terms, he focuses on the development of vernacular and national print languages in the Americas and Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the extent to which the bourgeoisie could achieve solidarities on an 'imaginary' basis through 'visualising' others like themselves through print.

The role Anderson allocates to texts, as well as the importance he places on language, in effect connects his study to a broader critical field that examines the production, distribution, and reception of texts. Thus, if we expand the notion of the 'text' to include visual artefacts (more specifically, in terms of this study, the two- and three-dimensional decorative programmes in and on public buildings), Anderson's premise on the relationship between texts and the invention of concepts of nationhood and identity seems to create a number of possibilities for further enquiry. I am particularly interested in the extent to which the choice of iconography in certain decorative programmes can be seen to play precisely the kind of didactic role in informing the creation of an 'imagined community' that Anderson ascribes to texts in his discussion. This is particularly relevant in the extent to which it is based, as it often is, on a selective and idealised interpretation (or, indeed, invention) of historical events and the concomitant construction of highly politicised archetypes and stereotypes.

A more recent generation of social theorists has generally accepted the notion of the 'imagined community' as a commonplace of nationalism, and has turned its attention to deconstructing the project of 'modernity', particularly as far as it intersects with nationalism. As Gerard Delanty and Patrick O'Mahoney put it in *Nationalism and Social Theory: Modernity and the Recalcitrance of the Nation* (2002), "[a]lthough nationalism has played a major role in modernity and has to

be counted as one of the dominant forms of realising collective identity, the idea of national identity is sometimes overextended" (Delanty and O'Mahony, 2002: xv). They argue that nationalism should rather be

> conceived as a semantic space, that expresses through manifold discourses the many kinds of projects, identities, interests and ideologies that make it up. In fact the history of nationalism can be viewed as one of the constant recombination of ever-shifting modalities of thinking and feeling about society (Delanty and O'Mahony, 2002: xv).

Delanty and O'Mahony also engage 'interpretive' theorists like Anderson and Hobsbawm in order to show the importance of understanding the role of culture within constructions of national identity. They argue, however, that both structuralist and interpretive accounts of nationalism have impoverished human agency (Wadham, 2003: 434), and point to "the relative autonomy of culture as it operates through the discourse of the nation" (Delanty and O'Mahony, 2002: 98).

In this context, it is worth noting Michael Billig's challenge to orthodox conceptions of nationalism in his *Banal Nationalism* (1995). Billig (1995: 8 – 9) describes as 'banal' the everyday, less obvious forms of nationalism that characterise the politically stable, ostensibly 'anational' countries of the First World; a form of nationalism that is neither obvious nor oppressive, and therefore more likely to lodge unnoticed in the collective unconscious. He suggests that in daily life nationalism is constantly 'flagged' in the media through routine symbols, citing as examples the flag that hangs unnoticed outside a public building, or habits of language. For him these serve as reminders of "a continual background for political discourses, for cultural products … [D]aily, its [the nation's] symbols and assumptions are flagged." Since nationalism continues to be a major ideological force in the contemporary world, Billig in effect argues that banal nationalism should not be mistaken for *benign* nationalism. As he puts it (1995: 175), national identities are always rooted within powerful social structures, which "inevitably reproduce hegemonic relations of inequity" and therefore, "if the future remains uncertain, we know the past history of nationalism. And that should be sufficient to encourage a habit of watchful suspicion" (Billig, 1995: 177).

1.2 Nationalism, art, and architecture in South Africa 1918 – 1940

The study of nationalism and identity in South Africa in the 1930s is largely dominated by works dealing with the origins and rise to prominence during this

decade of Afrikaner nationalism, and its promotion of the ideological construct of the *volk* as a galvanizing factor in all areas of political, social, economic and cultural life. Primary amongst these is Dan O'Meara's seminal study of the nationalistic political agenda underlying the various programmes of economic empowerment of the Afrikaner during the 1930s and 40s, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934 – 1948* (1983). O'Meara not only provides a thorough critical reading of the socio-economic history of the period, but also problematises the notion of *agency* in terms of constructs of nationhood, or the very process by which such constructs permeate the consciousness of all individuals in a community, across all social classes (or, in effect, Anderson's 'imagining'). While explaining the rise of Afrikaner nationalism during the 1930s largely in terms of a change in the balance of class and power relations both between white Afrikaans and English speakers, as well as between white Afrikaners and blacks, O'Meara (1983: 74) acknowledges the role played by cultural ideologues, but, extrapolating from Althusser, warns that

> it is not enough simply to trace the literary forms of development of the ideational structure and simply assume its inherent appeal to all Afrikaans speakers. The actual translation of such literary forms of ideology from intellectual journals and the debates of elite groups into a form of mass consciousness – the process by which the new subject was successfully interpellated – has to be investigated.

My study engages precisely with this kind of investigation, taking cognisance, on the one hand, of socio-economic issues that to a large extent drive and shape 'culture,' particularly with regard to the commission, production and reception of public art and architecture during the decade in question. On the other hand, while the discourse around the social factors regarding commission and production is a valuable starting point for contextualising the *effect* of such work within a broader rubric of socially determined meanings, it does not necessarily contribute to an understanding of the complex issues underlying its *affect* in terms of reception. For all its ostensibly ornamental nature the kind of work that I investigate in the various case studies is for the most part overtly didactic, and thus suggests that it had a powerful role to play in terms both of translating, and in effect distilling, highbrow intellectual precepts and debates into a widely visible and more accessible form. This in turn contributed, I will argue, in no

small measure to the construction of an 'imagined community', premised on the politically expedient notion of 'unity in diversity'.

Various writers have successfully explored the role of certain kinds of texts in creating amongst a broader audience an imagined identification with the key theoretical constructs of Afrikaner nationalism. Isabel Hofmeyr's (1987) important research into the development of Afrikaans as a literary language in the first two decades of the twentieth century provides compelling insights into how constructs of nationhood and identity by the Afrikaner intelligentsia were transmitted to Afrikaans speaking whites of all classes through the systematic development and promotion of Afrikaans language and literature. She argues that this was effected primarily to counter the perceived threat of '*verengelsing*' or assimilation into the dominant English culture and value systems, while being largely driven by the aspirations of the Afrikaner middle class to achieve economic and social parity with its English-speaking would-be counterparts. Hofmeyr shows how this elaboration of "nationalist notions … through the medium of literature" (Hofmeyr, 1987: 116), much of which was aimed largely at the Afrikaans working classes, had the effect of creating identification both with powerful cultural stereotypes (particularly as regards the role of Afrikaans women as *volksmoeders*, or 'mothers of the nation') and ultimately with of notions of nationalism rooted in a (largely invented) heroic past. The complex inter-relationship between these various forces – on the one hand socio-economic and on the other cultural – contributed significantly, she argues, to the development of a powerful support base for the ideals and aspirations of Afrikaner nationalism. Irma du Plessis (2002) comes to a similar conclusion in her work on the role of Afrikaans children's literature in the 1940s. She investigates the role played by the construction of stereotypes of Afrikaner masculinity in popular children's fiction in countering the perceived "dangers posed by the body and sexuality of the Afrikaner child to the project of nation building" (Du Plessis, 2002: unnumbered page).

Dunbar Moodie's *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (1975) identifies the social imaginary of the Afrikaner *volk* with the notion of a 'civil religion', or a quasi-religious belief that the destiny of the Afrikaner to triumph over English and black South Africans was pre-ordained. Moodie shows how educational and cultural policies advocated by

Afrikaner nationalists both before and during the apartheid era, were largely informed by this notion of a 'civil religion', finding its expression in such events as the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek, annual *volksfeeste* and the solemn, quasi-religious tone of celebrations to mark *Geloftedag*. The pomposity and self-consciousness of these events come to constitute, in effect, what Hobsbawm and Ranger describe in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983; reprinted 1992) as 'invented traditions.' In their analysis, many seemingly timeless public ceremonies are exposed as fairly recent, 'invented' constructs, often with an overtly political agenda, and not as ancient or immemorial as cultural ideologues hold them to be. Moodie contends that the "emotional identity" (Moodie 1975: 21) of Afrikaners of all classes during the early decades of this century was largely formed by the main themes of this civil religion (in Chapter 3, I show how this sense of a 'civil religion' quite literally informs aspects of the iconography of the decorative programme of the Pretoria City Hall).

The invention of traditions in the service of the Afrikaner civil religion is thoroughly demonstrated by Isabel Hofmeyr (1988) in an essay on Gustav Preller, the great culture-monger of Afrikaner nationalism before the Second World War. In this lively and informative essay, Hofmeyr shows how Preller's manipulation and inversion of historical events in the service of an imaginative (re)construction of the history of the Voortrekkers became an effective rallying point for Afrikaner nationalism. It not only enabled the building of a shared sense of history, but also became the signal event upon which the 'civil religion' of the Afrikaners was based: the inalienable right to the land, paid for in blood and sweat by the righteousness and selfless sacrifices of their ancestors. In this respect, she notes that a large portion of Preller's work on the Great Trek was characterised by graphic tales of violence and bloodshed. As she puts it:

> [v]irtually all Preller's texts read as an inventory of atrocities which eventually calcify into a set of almost legendary codes: the battered baby skulls, the dead women, the drifting feathers, the skinning alive and so on. All these shorthand images in turn acquire the status of implicit historical explanation and justification (Hofmeyr, 1988: 534).

She argues that this popularisation of violence and the quasi-religious rituals that developed around the ostensible 'remembrance' thereof, not only provided moral justification for land ownership, but also helped to establish powerful racial stereotypes of the 'civilised', 'righteous' Afrikaner as opposed to 'savage', 'murderous' blacks. By implication, it would appear that such stereotyping and

its continued reinforcement in the media (both print and pictorial) contributed in no small way to the widespread acceptance amongst Afrikaners of the aggressively racist social policies associated with Afrikaner nationalism. These policies were ultimately to be institutionalised in the form of apartheid.

Hermann Giliomee's recent *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (2003) returns to some of these debates, largely building on the existing historiography of Afrikaner nationalism, but at times challenging current orthodoxy. (Controversially, for example, he argues that apartheid ensured steady economic growth in South Africa from the 1960s, and that had a socialist or liberal democratic system been in place, this would have resulted in "a precipitous economic decline from which South Africa would have taken years to recover" (Giliomee, 2003: 538 – 9)). While most of the 700 page text is devoted to giving an account of the Afrikaners "with empathy but without partisanship" (Giliomee 2003: xiii), Giliomee also argues that three areas in the existing historiography of Afrikanerdom warrant closer attention. These are, "the importance of religion as a social-political force" (Giliomee, 2003: xvi, 454 – 464), the role of women in Afrikaner nationalism and protonationalism (Giliomee 2003: xvi – xvii, 231 f., 256, 334, 375 f.), and "the interrelationship between language and nationalism" (Giliomee, 2003: xvii, 215 – 219, 223 ff., 361 – 369 ff. and 401 f.). It is interesting that it is precisely these areas on which cultural and art historians have focused their analyses of Afrikaner nationalism.

Proceeding from both Hofmeyr's and Moodie's work, Liese van der Watt (1997), for example, examines the relationship between such racial stereotyping and the mythologising of the Great Trek in her discussion of the marble frieze in the Voortrekker Monument and the Voortrekker tapestries in the Voortrekker Monument Museum, designed and produced between 1938 and 1949. She argues (1997: 36) that in institutionalising the relative depiction of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' in both the frieze and the tapestries, the concept of race comes to be seen as a "stable, obvious and 'natural' category rather than an invented and historically constructed one." The continually reinforced opposition thus created between white 'civilisation' and black 'savagery' therefore comes to serve as both a powerful signifier of Afrikaner culture, as well as an ostensibly neutral reference point for the institutionalization of its mythic history. Van der Watt's compelling argument for the notion of the relationship between visual texts and

the expression of an 'imagined community' provides a useful point of reference for critically engaging with the iconography of public artworks produced during this period. In this thesis, however, I explore the construction in the visual arts and architectures of such imagined communities and identities across a broader socio-political spectrum than that described solely in terms of Afrikaner nationalism.

Although not articulated precisely in these terms, the notion of a 'civil religion' and its expression in public art largely also informs Nico Coetzee's work on the Pierneef station panels (1992). Coetzee (1992: 21) argues that the landscapes depicted in the panels, commissioned for the newly completed Johannesburg Park Station and completed in 1932, must be viewed in the context of Pierneef's strong identification with the aims and ideals of Afrikaner nationalism. On the one hand rooted in a "long European tradition" of landscape painting that seeks to explore the correspondences between the outer perceptual world and the inner spiritual world of the artist, Coetzee argues that these paintings function largely as expressions of the 'civil religion' of the Afrikaner. In effect, they simultaneously create and reinforce an imagined identification with the land, and the inalienable right – divinely ordained and paid for by the mythic suffering of the Voortrekkers – to ownership and the subsequent imposition of order and control. He argues that the static, formulaic, and dehumanised character of the paintings in effect mirrors this notion of the imposition of order and control on the landscape:

> [The depiction of the landscape is] … an invitation to possession and ownership because it is empty … reassuring because its aestheticising distance means that it is frozen in time – eternally present … in its unexplored and unexploited condition, it is the expectation of riches and potential – the sign of divine election (Coetzee, 1992: 24).

Coetzee further shows how Pierneef, despite being Dutch by birth and upbringing, was a prominent member of a small elite of Afrikaner intellectuals and cultural ideologues. Like others in this group, including the architect Gerhard Moerdijk and the indefatigable Gustav Preller, he vociferously advocated the need for a 'genuine' Afrikaans style of art and architecture that was rooted in neither the Cape Dutch nor the English traditions. The concomitant creation of a hybrid Afrikaner 'craft' identity that borrowed from

both indigenous African art and architecture as well as Voortrekker artefacts[3] had by the 1930s assumed an increasingly nationalistic and exclusivist undertone. By locating the station panels in this charged nationalistic rubric, Coetzee argues that these highly public (as the hub of a national train network as well as of a burgeoning tourist industry, Johannesburg's Park Station was the busiest station in the Union) and much celebrated paintings played an important role in reinforcing Afrikaner nationalist constructs of identity. Coetzee concludes by arguing, "[Pierneef] gave Afrikaners a pictorial evocation of what they wanted to believe of the land and of themselves" (Coetzee, 1992: 25).

Coetzee's argument is eloquent and supported by painstaking research into both the circumstances – political and otherwise – of the commission and the sites selected by Pierneef (all of which, according to Coetzee, in one way or another resonate with contemporary constructs of Afrikaner nationalism). For the most part, however, he does not adequately account for the fact that not all viewers were necessarily Afrikaners, nationalist or otherwise. I would argue that his notion of the extreme degree of formal control evident in the paintings functioning in some way as a trope for the "spectacular success" (Coetzee, 1992: 30) of the ideological control exerted by Afrikaner nationalism, must be seen as part of a wider field of affect. In effect, it could be seen equally to reinforce the colonial as well as the nationalistic gaze, as well as being at least partly explained by contemporary notions of 'modernistic' style. That it constructs an imagined community is not the question, but to what extent is this imagining unequivocal, and to what extent does it – given the competing political agendas of 1930s nationalism in South Africa – enter into a wider discourse about *a priori* ownership and control? Implicit in my discussion of Pierneef's panels in South Africa House in Chapter 2, and indeed throughout this thesis, is the assumption that an examination of a broader spectrum of publicly commissioned (and less acclaimed) artworks and decorative programmes during this period, may shed some light on this question.

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[3] See Hofmeyr (1987) for a discussion of the promotion by popular magazines like *Die Huisgenoot* and *Die Boerevrou* of 'Voortrekker' furniture and artifacts in the pursuit of creating in the domestic sphere a sense of an Afrikaner identity rooted in 'historic' craft. In her article "Popularising History: the case of Gustav Preller" (1988) Hofmeyr discusses Preller's much idealised and sanitised interpretation of Voortrekker *realia*, including clothing, everyday objects and even Piet Retief's Eastern Cape homestead, which had the singular distinction of being "popularised on a Christmas card" (1988:72).

It should be clear from the literature that I have reviewed in this subsection that there is a fair body of work dealing critically with the causes and effects of the visual arts pressed into the service of Afrikaner nationalism in the inter-World War period. However, with the exception of a number of critical investigations into the Voortrekker Monument[4] (which, strictly speaking, should be viewed as a post-Second World War structure, although it was begun in the late 1930s), considerably less scholarly work has been done on the relationship between architecture, architectural ornament, and constructs of identity and nationalism in this period *per se*. In fact, with the exception of Gilbert Herbert's 1975 book *Martienssen and the International Style: the Modern Movement in South African Architecture* – the relevance of which to this thesis is discussed more fully below – there has, to date, been no wide-ranging study devoted exclusively to South African inter-World War architecture. Various authors have, however, engaged with specific aspects of architectural history during this period in short research articles, or subsumed questions of identity under broader surveys of architectural style. I conclude this Literature Review with a critical examination of these texts, looking first at the more general surveys from the 1920s to the present and second at articles dealing with specific themes relevant to this study.

1.3 Surveys of 'historical' South African architecture

Large-scale studies of South African architecture have, until fairly recently, tended to focus either on 'historic' (that is, pre-twentieth century) colonial architecture, or have taken the form of monographs on, or *catalogues raisonés* of the works of, 'important' individual architects, both 'historic' and 'modern'. Possibly the earliest of these works, Dorothea Fairbridge's 1922 *Historic Houses of South Africa*,[5] in a sense set the tone for works in the former category, establishing, as it did, a discourse around the stylistic and historical 'heritage' represented by the large homesteads and townhouses of the Dutch and English colonial plutocracy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although Geoffrey Pearse's *Eighteenth Century Architecture in South Africa* published a

[4] See Coetzee (1992), Van der Watt (1997), Delmont (1993), and Crampton (2001). The Voortrekker Monument also falls outside the range of my thesis since, although it is indubitably an architectural statement, I would argue that the considerations in terms of intention and usage between a 'monument' and a 'public building' are substantially different.

[5] Significantly, architecture as an independent profession in South Africa was only formalised in the 1920s. It is also during this decade that local universities established schools of architecture.

decade later (1933) is not confined only to domestic architecture, his text operates in much the same way. It merely provides a formal reading of the stylistic 'developments' of eighteenth-century colonial architecture, but, as was customary in art historical writing at the time, does not attempt to locate these in a broader social or historical context.

After the hiatus of the war years, the 1950s saw a number of texts devoted to the theme of celebrating the cultural and architectural heritage of the Cape in the eighteenth century. This must be partly understood in view of the fact that this decade marked the tercentenary celebrations of van Riebeeck's 1652 landing at the Cape, which gave the newly constituted Nationalist government an opportunity to construct a coherent founding myth for the South African nation, centred on the figure of van Riebeeck as the 'founding father'.[6] Examples include De Bosdari's *Cape Dutch Houses and Farms* (1953), Pearse's *The Cape of Good Hope, 1652 – 1833* (1956), Joy Collier's *Stellenbosch Revisited* (1959), and the Rothmans' *The Drostdy at Swellendam* (1960). These writers all, in one way or another, extol the virtues of Cape Dutch architecture in terms of its formal beauty, grace and sympathy with its context, with scant attention to the broader social implications of the cultural impact of colonialism. Implicit in all these readings is the notion of Cape Dutch architecture as being a truly national style, yet still rooted in an unbroken historical identification with the civilising influence of its European origins. In retrospect, the implicit imagined identification with an historical community and contemporary nationalistic concerns is hard to ignore.

Of course, claims for the 'authenticity' of Cape Dutch architecture were made much earlier, largely informing, for example, Herbert Baker's – and consequently a legion of his imitators' – work in the early decades of the twentieth century. Advancing what was to become a stock argument based on a somewhat gratuitous construction of the notion of a *genius loci*, The *South African Builder* noted in 1920 that Cape Dutch architecture "posses[es] types which are naturally suited to our South African climate and to our special South African needs. They seem to fit in naturally with their surroundings. They are elegant and pleasing, yet simple." A decade later Gerhard Moerdijk, a vociferous champion of the

[6] See Rasool and Witz (1992: 25 – 26) for a discussion of the extent to which van Riebeeck came to represent "the spirit of apartheid and the beginnings of white domination."

notion of an 'authentic' *volksargitektuur* as one of the fundamental instruments of Afrikaner nation building, attempted to wrest the Cape Dutch style away from its anglicised, Bakeresque associations. Cape Dutch architecture, he wrote in 1932, should be seen as "*'n suiwere Afrikaanse produk*" ('a pure Afrikaner product') and in 1933 that "*Die Kaaps-Hollandse boustyl is op dieselfde manier 'n Afrikaanse produk as die Afrikaanse taal, die Afrikanerbees en, per slot van rekening, die Afrikaner self*" ('the Cape Dutch style is in the same way an Afrikaans product as the Afrikaner language, the Afrikaner ox and, in the final analysis, the Afrikaner himself is') (Moerdijk, 1932, my translation). In general practice, however, it was Baker's expedient marriage – in pursuit of an appropriately regional style – of the Cape Dutch style with Mediterranean classicism that held sway in the first decades of the twentieth century. As the *South African Builder* (November, 1923: 25) put it in 1923,

> In arriving at a happy solution to the problem of developing a South African style we could not do better than to turn to Italy and the Renaissance movement [*sic*] for inspiration. The open cortile, the heavy cornices and the piazzas and belvederes were all the type of thing, which naturally developed in a land where there were blue skies, and an abundance of sunshine.

In fact, concerns with 'South Africanism' neither were absent nor marginalised from architectural debate in the early decades of the century. As early as September 1918, the *Architect, Builder and Engineer* (vol. 2 no. 2) commented on "our so-called South African style of architecture" and questioned "is there such a thing?" The writer presented a critique of the Cape Dutch-Mediterranean style in contemporary designs, dismissively describing this approach as "a thinly-veiled crib of the earlier Groot Constantia gable wedded to stock columns of the Classic revival in Europe." The writer continues by questioning whether it would "not be better to meet our local requirements logically than to attempt to label them Cape Dutch? If we build logically to meet our needs will we not arrive at a true South African style?" and concludes that, "it is worthy of thought". This trend continued throughout the 1920s. The same journal (Volume 4: November 1920 to February 1921) ran a series of four articles entitled 'On the Need for a South African Architecture' which once again debated – with a fair degree of scepticism – the appropriateness of a conflation of Cape Dutch vernacular architecture with European Renaissance architecture as devolving upon something 'typically' South African. Furthermore, throughout the 1930s, the

architectural press expresses concern for the use of South African materials and products, partly to militate against the effects of the Depression, and partly as a means of ensuring a 'typically' South African style.

These debates are surprisingly persistent, having resurfaced recently in the wake of Ora Joubert's attack on the contemporary South African architectural profession's ongoing flirtation with 'Tuscan' styling. In a strongly worded inaugural address as the head of the architecture department of the University of Pretoria in 2004 she decried the current "infatuation with Tuscany or rather '*Tos-Afrikaans'*, even '*Boere-Spaans*'" (*cit.* Yoro Badat, 2005: 7). Offering as examples the Mpumalanga and Northern Cape Legislature buildings as well as the new Constitutional Court (see Chapter 5), she argued instead for what she described as an "Afro-pean" approach, or "work that celebrates our socio-economic and environmental particularities while respecting the integrity of Euro-centric design premises" (*cit.* Yoro Badat, 2005: 7). Implicit in this debate seems to be the problematic assertion that if architects are to engage a language of historicism and traditionalism they would do better to do so by referring to the more 'authentic' regional language of Cape Dutch architecture than to the 'alien' fantasy of the Mediterranean exemplified by the pervasive pseudo-Tuscan style. At least, this is the interpretation of the debate as it was filtered into the popular press. Expediently ignoring the fact that, ostensible regionalism notwithstanding, the Cape Dutch style is as expressive of a pseudo-European sensibility as is the Tuscan, the *Saturday Star* (Yoro Badat, 2005: 7) contrasted photographs of two "inappropriate" and "passé" 'Tuscan' buildings with the "timeless … [elegance of the] Cape Dutch proportions of an eco-friendly streetscape: Church Street, Tulbagh."

In the heady nationalistic atmosphere following the establishment of the republic in 1961, the notion of the cultural 'heritage' represented by Cape Dutch (and, to a lesser extent, English colonial) architecture was increasingly promoted and being consolidated in texts issued or endorsed by newly formed conservation societies. Significant amongst these is a series of books sponsored by the oil company Caltex and entitled *Conservation of Our Heritage* (1966). The first part of this series, subtitled *Preservation of old buildings and historic relics* (edited by J. Ploeger, F.C.L. Bosman, W.H.J. Punt and A. Gordon Bagnall), stated the case very clearly in its introduction:

> This new series of booklets … is dedicated to the cause of preserving, instead of squandering, the valuable resources *bequeathed by nature and our forefathers*. It is designed and issued … [as part of] … the commemoration of the birth of the Republic of South Africa (Ploeger *et al.*, 1966: unnumbered page. Emphasis added).

Although James Walton deals in a short chapter in this text with "Folk Architecture in South Africa" (Ploeger *et al.*, 1966: unnumbered page) in which he introduces indigenous (that is, pre-colonial) architecture, he is quick to point out that such 'vernacular' architecture has "not developed beyond the simple fundamental forms." It is clear that by 'folk' architecture he means the humbler dwellings erected by frontier farmers and settlers, which, although not as glamorous as the larger homesteads and townhouses of the Cape, nonetheless provide ample evidence of a venerable 'tradition' of authentically (colonial) South African architecture.

A flurry of similar texts followed. Examples include *The Preservation and Restoration of Historic Buildings in South Africa* (1968), the Department of Information's *Groote Schuur: Residence of South Africa's Prime Ministers* (1970), De Bosdari's *Cape Dutch Houses and Farms: Their Architecture and History Together With a Note on the Role of Cecil John Rhodes in their Preservation* (1971) and various publications on specific buildings issued by the Simon van der Stel Foundation. Established in 1959 as a non-profit organisation with the stated aim of preserving and restoring 'historic' buildings, this organisation – as the name suggests – concentrated for the most part on preserving and promoting Cape Dutch architecture. In effect, the nationalistic undertones of this project are difficult to ignore. In the foreword to part one of *Conservation of our Heritage* (1966) for example, the Foundation's director, Dr. W.H.J. Punt unabashedly refers to Cape Dutch architecture as "our national style of building [which] came into being in the past with its national character and pride unmingled" (*Conservation of our Heritage* 1966: unnumbered page). He goes on to speak of the important role the Foundation has to play in "stimulat[ing] the national conscience" as regards the importance of this architectural heritage. Hans Fransen was also particularly prolific in this period, producing *The Old Houses of the Cape* (1965), *Architectural Beauty of the Old Cape as seen by Arthur Elliot* (1969), and *Groot Constantia* (1972 (reprinted 1978)) in short order. All of these texts in effect served to consolidate further the useful – if somewhat artificially

inflated – link between a three-century-old Dutch architectural tradition and the cultural concerns of the new Afrikaner republic.

The 1960s also saw a shift in emphasis from the eighteenth to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with texts like Ronald Lewcock's 1961 thesis *The Architecture of the Cape Colony from 1795 to 1837*, which appeared in print as *Early Nineteenth Century Architecture in South Africa: A Study of the Interaction of Two Cultures 1795 – 1837* (1963). As the title implies, this work explores the stylistic ramifications of the shift from a predominantly Dutch to a predominantly English polity. Doreen Greig's *Herbert Baker in South Africa* (1970), also based on a lengthy doctoral thesis completed in 1963, was the first attempt to provide a systematic survey of Baker's South African work and to engage critically with aspects of his style (not least his interest in, and revival of, Cape Dutch architecture). Extrapolating largely from precedents set by the authors mentioned above, Désirée Picton-Seymour produced the lavishly illustrated *Victorian Buildings in South Africa: Including Edwardian and Transvaal Republican Styles 1850 – 1910* in 1977, thus extending the field of survey to include work outside of the ambit of strictly colonial architecture, but still staying safely in the realm of the 'historical'.

1.4 Surveys of modern South African architecture

Modernity – in the rather limited sense of that term as indicating an appropriate response to the perceived values and character of the present – was for most South African architects in the 1930s essentially a question of style rather than of substance. Notwithstanding the sophisticated understanding of the theories and practical applications of the European vanguard modern movement by Rex Martienssen and his colleagues at the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Architecture, architects for the most part subscribed to the entrenched notion – born of a rigorous and conservative training in the beaux arts tradition – that ornament was an essential and integral part of the design process. Thus, notions of the 'modern' were conveyed, for the most part, by re-thinking surface rather than structure.

Of course, South African architects were not unique in this respect: the trend internationally was towards the kind of popular 'modernist' style that is now commonly – if somewhat gratuitously – referred to as 'art deco'. As Robinson and Bletter, in one of the first serious re-evaluations of what they termed 'skyscraper

style,' put it in 1975, "[art deco] architecture … also, in fact, reflects an international style, one that for a time was much more widely accepted than *the* International Style" (Robinson and Bletter, 1975: 3). In terms of this 'international style', buildings would be constructed according to the latest construction techniques and finishes, some of which – like the wrap-around windows, white stucco finish, and machine-inspired references – were appropriated shamelessly from the purist aesthetics of the modern movement. Ornament would however, still be applied in those areas that, according to beaux arts tradition, were generally elaborated in this way: the entrances, window frames, and roof profiles. But whereas the beaux arts tradition called for the application and interpretation of the classical orders, the spirit of 'modernity' found expression in a vast and eclectic array of stylistic influences, some of which had particular resonance in terms of evoking a particular sense of place and history.

These often vexed questions of style in the South African architectural scene of the 1930s inform, implicitly or explicitly, all the relevant writing on the period. To a greater or lesser extent, the debates around classicism, regionalism and modernism are advocated, each in turn, and to the exclusion of the others, by different stakeholders as the only possible starting point for an 'appropriate' South African architecture: that is, an architecture that was at once expressive of 'modernity' (that is, the sweeping social, cultural, and political changes that were taking place in the wake of increasing urbanisation and industrialisation) and – that shibboleth of political parties on both sides of the nationalist spectrum – of an 'authentic' South African sensibility.

One of the primary sources in this regard is L. Cumming-George's two volumes entitled *Architecture in South Africa* (Volume One, 1933 and Volume Two, 1934). These books mark the first attempt to provide a systematic overview of 'modern' (that is, contemporaneous with Cumming-George's writing) architecture in South Africa, and to engage (albeit tentatively) with debates regarding 'historical' as opposed to 'modern' and 'national' styles. Reiterating the debates around the search for a 'typically' South African style, he writes in his foreword to Volume One (1933: 33) that,

> Cape Dutch architecture is one of our most artistic and national assets, but side by side with it, have grown up our English styles in domestic work,

> together with the modernism which is at once an expression of our age and a new art.

Interestingly, he also recognises the political significance of this, given that he is writing in the context of fusion politics:

> It is perhaps, for those who love this land, a significant fact that this volume which unites both South African and English architecture, should be given to the public at a time when the two races are at last beginning to understand and trust each other.

A similar sentiment had also informed an earlier observation in the February 1927 edition of *Architect, Builder and Engineer*, which described the appointment of Gerhard Moerdijk and Gordon Leith as the architects for the Johannesburg Station as a "singularly happy selection on the part of the government … for one is a South African born architect of British descent and the other of Dutch – a singularly happy omen for the future."

In Volume Two (1934: 21) Cumming-George notes that "the modern note is emphasizing itself, but apart from that, South Africa is creating an architecture which, while it may follow the modern trend, is distinctly and definitely South African". While both volumes of *Architecture in South Africa* aimed to be "a faithful and unbiassed [*sic*] record of modern buildings … [presented] in such a form as to make [them] attractive to the layman as well as the expert" (Cumming-George, 1933: 33), they were clearly aimed at the architectural and building fraternity. The fact that it was sponsored by the leading trade journals of the day, *Architect, Builder and Engineer*, the *South African Architectural Record* and the *South African Builder*, as well as endless pages of advertisements of builders' materials, equipment, and architectural finishes clearly attest to this. Therefore, he does not engage this tantalising statement in any significant depth. Apart from the occasional reference to the use of South African materials, the commentary on each building reads for the most part like a trade catalogue, extolling the virtues of imaginatively named patent products designed to simplify the builder's life, and it is left up to the reader to determine the extent of the 'definitely South African' trend.

Nonetheless, both volumes of *Architecture in South Africa* are a valuable primary point of reference for any study of the architecture of the period for two reasons. First, it is lavishly illustrated with photographs, drawings and plans of a number of buildings (some of which are no longer extant) as they appeared in the 1930s, and thus provides an accessible point of reference for comparative

analyses. Second, and more importantly, it gives a rare insight into how the notion of the 'modern', as well as ideas around a South African identity were commonly understood and used in the South African architectural vocabulary of the 1930s. These debates around 'modernity' – and the appropriateness (or lack thereof) to the profession – were to be continued in the pages of the trade journals of the day, particularly in the *South African Builder* and the *South African Architectural Record*, with different writers variously advocating 'modernity' over tradition or vice-versa.

Cumming-George's two slim volumes notwithstanding (and bearing in mind that he was writing as a journalist and not as an historian), it is thus clear that the major trend in the writing of architectural history in South Africa until the 1970s devolved largely around 'historical' rather than modern or contemporary architecture. Even then, as I have noted, this trend towards the study of 'historical' South African architecture was expressed only in terms of cataloguing and describing of stylistic trends rather than engaging in any depth with the broader socio-political implications. A short article by O. Price Lewis (1948: 156) entitled "South Africa: Contemporary Architecture" in a special issue of *The Studio* devoted to South African art, is something of an exception. "Under the influence of the late Sir Herbert Baker," he writes,

> attempts to formulate a South African style, in which eighteenth-century South African baroque became welded to Italianate forms, met with indifferent success. With the exception of this one experiment in national style, South African architects have consistently turned their eyes beyond their own borders.

Another exception is Doreen Greig's *A Guide to Architecture in South Africa* (1971), in which she sets out to provide a comprehensive survey of, and commentary on, a broad range of South African buildings, most of which were built in the twentieth century, and many of which were in fact contemporary with her writing. Greig's text centres largely around the notion of a linear 'development' of the stylistic characteristics of modern architecture, and apart from making some fairly generalised observations regarding the shift in the 1960s and 70s towards internationalism, does not engage with the broader cultural ramifications of the debates around modernism and modernity in South African architecture.

More successful in this regard is Clinton Harrop-Allin's *Norman Eaton – Architect: A Study of the Work of the South African Architect Norman Eaton, 1902*

– *1966* (1975), which engages issues both of modernity and of regionalism as expressed in Eaton's highly individualistic style. The critical value of this approach is marred, however, by a tendency to present a kind of bio-hagiography of the architect, couched in terms of his distinctive 'genius' and its unique response to the local environment. A similar tendency, to a degree of feverish adulation, characterizes the 1999 monograph on Gerard Moerdijk by his daughter, Irma Vermeulen, entitled *Man en Monument: Die Lewe en Werk van Gerard Moerdijk*. Vermeulen provides a thorough summary of the conditions of commission and production of Moerdijk's architectural work as well as a *catalogue raisonné* of his not inconsiderable *oeuvre*. Nevertheless – the grandiloquent title apart – one cannot but question the critical objectivity of a text that proudly features a full-page photograph of the author "*op haar troudag op die trappe van die Voortrekkermonument*" (on her wedding day on the steps of the Voortrekker Monument) (Vermeulen, 1999: 101, my translation).

The 1970s also saw the publication of Gilbert Herbert's *Martienssen and the International Style: the Modern Movement in South African Architecture* (1975), to date the only full-length book devoted to South African architectural practice and debate in South Africa in the 1930s. Herbert provides a fascinating and painstakingly researched account of the extent to which Rex Martienssen championed the European modern movement's principles at the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Architecture during this decade. He explores in some depth the politics of the crisis of style represented by the 'traditionalists' on the one hand, and the 'modernists' on the other. This is nowhere more clearly exemplified than by the architecture of the University's Great Hall, the atavistic portico and façade of which stands in strong opposition to the restrained, functionalist aesthetics of the interior and courtyard, completed in 1936 to Martienssen's design after the building was gutted by fire (figure 1).

The 'traditionalists', led by Geoffrey Pearse, advocated entrenched Beaux Arts conventions of symmetrical planning behind symmetrical, classically inspired façades. The 'modernists', a coterie of intellectuals led by Rex Martienssen and fuelled by a near messianic fervour for Le Corbusier's freshly minted 'five principles of modern architecture', aggressively promoted the open-plan, asymmetrical architecture of the European avant-garde, whose utopian machine aesthetic eschewed gratuitous ornament. As Price-Lewis (1948: 156) put it,

> The decade before the late war saw the rise of a powerful movement centred in the Transvaal around the enthusiasm of the Department of Architecture of the University of the Witwatersrand for the works of the Cubist School of architects of the European scene. Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, particularly the former, were looked up to and their works studied and absorbed.

Gilbert comes down heavily on the side of these 'true' modernists, and the bulk of his book is devoted to an explication of the various examples of these ideas in practice. He shows that, while Martienssen's architectural theories and teaching had little more than a marginal impact on the architectural establishment of the 1930s, the tone of moral authority that characterised them was certainly to have a profound and lasting effect on subsequent generations of South African educators and architects.

Thus, although *Martienssen and the International Style* is concerned with the history and analysis of a very different architectural ethos of the 1930s than that which I discuss in this thesis, it is an important point of reference. It brings into sharp relief debates around what constituted 'true' modernity in the architectural rubric of the decade in question: on the one hand, the modernism within essentially classical forms advocated by the traditionalists and which we have come to know – somewhat expediently – as art deco, and on the other the radical reductionism of the asymmetrical, ahistorical, concrete-and-glass box that, for better or worse, we associate with the international style. Gilbert's text, then, is useful not so much in its own terms, but rather in terms of what it *does not* engage except to dismiss it: the entrenched belief amongst the majority of influential and important architects in the 1930s that 'modernity' was essentially a question of style rather than of substance, and that ornament was an essential and integral part of the design process.

Internationally the tide of architectural theory and practice began to turn against the highbrow orthodoxy of modernism in the 1970s, with Robert Venturi's texts *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) and *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) being highly influential in informing the somewhat reactionary principles, stylistically speaking, of what was rapidly to become known as 'post-modernism'. The seeds of Venturi's argument – the favouring of the local and particular over the universal; a return to historical ornament and allusion and symbolism over functionalist dogma – soon found fertile ground in the influential writing and practice of architects like Charles

Jencks (for instance *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, 1978) and Aldo Rossi (for instance *Aldo Rossi In America: 1976 to 1979*, 1979). Both these writers variously advocated a 'new' stylistic approach based on the vernacular as well as the classical. In time, post-modern architecture would assume the theoretical complexity of its literary counterpart, but in the early 1970s it had a fairly straightforward agenda. It advocated the rejection of the utopian purism of the international style, which was seen as a social failure, in favour of an architecture that was popular, accessible, and eclectic; that favoured the particular over the universal, and that replaced the international style's esoteric disdain of popular culture with the shameless acceptance of kitsch and the mundane. In short, it advocated an architecture that returned to decoration as a necessary condition of style. As Venturi (1966) put it in a sly riposte to Mies van der Rohe – "less is a bore".

Historicism and pastiche were the natural corollaries of this eclecticism. Although South African architects were only to wake up to the possibilities of the new style in the 1980s, it is interesting to note that an interest in historical forms other than those of 'old' (that is, Cape Dutch and Victorian) buildings started to emerge in the latter half of the 1970s. In 1978, for example, the Cape Provincial Institute of Architects published a comprehensive, three-volume survey entitled *The Buildings of Central Cape Town*. For the first time the historical significance of the forgotten or marginalised decorative forms of the twentieth century, and particularly those of the 1930s, were engaged – albeit superficially, given the nature of the project – in a scholarly way.[7] This was also touched on by Hans Fransen in his ambitious synoptic survey, *Drie Eeue Kuns in Suid-Afrika* (1981) in which he acknowledged the existence of a popular modernism in 1930s South African architecture, but dismissed it merely as a fashionable trend on the fringes of an international design style. Nonetheless, the critical attitude towards the architecture of the 1930s, and the recognition that the stylistic innovations of the decade represented a particular significance in the history of South Africa was becoming increasingly apparent. The architect David van den Heever (1983: 37) succinctly summed up this attitude in a comment on the Old

[7] The Pietermaritzburg City Council undertook a similar project in 1986, published as *Buildings of Pietermaritzburg*. In turn, the Pretoria City Council commissioned a survey of the buildings of the city centre in 1990, which resulted in two volumes of extant structures, with a brief commentary on their stylistic attributes and current condition (Le Roux 1990).

Mutual Building in Cape Town (see Chapter 4) in the March/April 1983 issue of *Architecture SA*:

> After considering [the Old Mutual building] for years as just another ugly 1930s pile, the joy of rediscovering it was immense. It of course has come back into prominence in this 'post modern' age, but it stands on its own merits … [I]t is a well detailed building of great quality and even today looks as good as ever.

This emerging interest in the architectural legacy of the 1930s was in many respects consolidated by the 1985 Institute of South African Architects' Biennial National Congress entitled "The 30s – what happened, what next?" Speakers at this congress considered not only the different manifestations of modernism in South African architecture, but also discussed issues of conservation and legislation to protect significant twentieth-century structures.[8]

Following in the wake both of this newfound interest in more recent architectural history and Johannesburg's centenary, Gerard-Mark Van der Waal published *From Mining Camp to Metropolis: the Buildings of Johannesburg 1886 – 1940* in 1987. This text provides a valuable summary of the economic and social conditions affecting the theory and practice of architecture in Johannesburg from its origins as a mining town to the decade immediately following the granting of city status in 1928, as well as an overview of significant architectural styles and trends. Of specific interest to my thesis is the final chapter, "The Modern Metropolis 1920 – 1940" in which Van der Waal provides a lengthy justification for his contention that

> Johannesburg acquired the metropolitan character for which it is so well known during the 1920s and 1930s, when the central business district was built up with skyscrapers, and houses in the modern styles appeared in the extensive suburbs (Van der Waal 1987: 167).

Although his discussion is couched largely in terms of issues affecting or arising from town planning, including zoning restrictions and engineering capabilities, he engages tentatively with issues of style. Clearly not yet comfortable with the term 'art deco' that would become the term of choice for subsequent writers (*q.v.*),

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[8] This was followed in 1988 with the Fourth Annual Congress of the South African Association of Art Historians on the theme of "The Thirties: Art in Context". Unfortunately the proceedings of neither of these conferences was published, but Marilyn Martin gives a first-hand account of some of the pertinent issues in her 1994 article, "Art Deco Architecture in South Africa", *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 20, 1994: 9 – 37. Two articles arising from the architectural conference were published in *Architecture SA*, viz. B. Cooke's "Le Groupe Transvaal" (Issue 1, Jan. 1988: 17 – 19) and Julian Cooke's "Shifts after the thirties" (Issue 7, Jul. 1993: 23 – 30).

he describes the prevailing modernism of the period as the "Ahistorical Style" (Van der Waal, 1987: 184) which represents

> A complete break with specific historical references … [but in which] … the symmetrical Beaux Arts design structure of the façade still survived. While this style did not incorporate specific references to the machine aesthetics, it nevertheless prepared the public for later developments (Van der Waal, 1987: 184).

These later developments he describes as the "Steamboat Style" (Van der Waal, 1987: 184), or a popular version of the machine aesthetic. This is not to be confused, he argues, with the international style, "also known as the Wits School" (Van der Waal, 1987: 187), by which he means the Corbusian dogmatism of Martienssen and his colleagues at the University of the Witwatersrand, which forms, as I have discussed, the subject of Gilbert Herbert's monograph.

As a comprehensive survey drawing on painstaking primary research in municipal archives and the like, Van der Waal's text is a useful primary resource, while his identification of stylistic trends raises some interesting questions around the development of critical taxonomies in the writing on modern architecture in South Africa. Given both the wide-ranging nature of the survey and the fact that it is situated in a fairly narrow socio-economic rubric, there is much room to explore the ramifications and implications of the debates regarding the nature and function of style (and its first cousin, ornament) that he raises. In other words, while he successfully *describes* the manifestations of the debates around the origins and functions of modernist style, he does not necessarily engage them in any significant critical depth.

More successful in this regard is Clive Chipkin's 1993 *magnum opus*, *Johannesburg Style: Architecture and Society 1880's – 1960s*. Chipkin's text expands upon van der Waal's survey not only in terms of its greater chronological sweep, but also in providing a much more closely argued socio-economic reading of both the practical as well as the aesthetic considerations of Johannesburg architecture; the various and oft-changing nature of which comes to constitute the 'Johannesburg style' of the book's title. Chipkin devotes a substantial section to the inter-World War period, analyzing in some critical depth the different manifestations of modernism during this period and their relationship to the construction of notions of urban identity. He also includes sections on the Voortrekker Monument and what he calls 'the national question', in which he introduces the debate regarding the didactic or political functions of architectural

ornament, particularly in the period immediately before and after the Second World War.

In many ways, Chipkin's text may be considered a definitive history of Johannesburg architecture of the period he reviews. He balances first-hand experience of, and personal contact with, leading Johannesburg architects over a number of decades with a well-researched and incisive understanding of the socio-political dynamics that inform the theory and practice of urban planning and architecture not only in Johannesburg, but also more generally in South Africa. Given the necessarily wide-ranging nature of the survey, however, there is scope for closer critical analysis of specific aspects, not least in terms of investigating the overt or implicit meanings, political and otherwise, of various decorative programmes. By examining the façades and decorative programmes of significant public and commercial buildings in a broader South African context, I show how the freeing of the vocabulary of ornament from the shackles of the classical orders that had dominated significant architectural projects in the first decades of the twentieth century paved the way for the construction of alternative and more contemporary iconographies. Within the broader rubric of this new stylistic language, the notion of a South African identity could be explored and defined, and powerful cultural stereotypes, which, to some extent, resonate into the present, evolved in its service.

1.5 Specific themes in inter-World War architecture

As I have noted above there has been, with the exception of Herbert Gilbert's *Martienssen and the International Style*, a lack of sustained critical writing dealing specifically with the inter-World War period in South African architecture. Although Van der Waal and Chipkin provide surveys of the period in the context of more general readings of Johannesburg architecture, the only other notable work has been in the form of short articles dealing with specific aspects of the architectural debates that inform our understanding of the 1930s. In particular, a general revival of interest internationally in the art deco design style and its manifestation in architecture saw that term coming into common usage to describe the 'popular (*i.e.* decorated) modernism' of the period. The early 1990s saw the publication of Marilyn Martin's essay "Art Deco Architecture in South Africa" (1994), which charts the influence of the art deco design style on South African (and more specifically Johannesburg's) architecture of the 1930s.

A fair portion of the article, extrapolating from an earlier article published in *Architecture SA* (Martin 1987), is devoted to the phenomenon of the 'atmospheric' cinemas of the period (of which the interior of the Playhouse in Durban is the only surviving example). Martin rather gratuitously ascribes the fantastical decoration of these cinemas to their function of "soothing the nerves and calming the perturbing thoughts" (Martin, 1994: 37) of the (white) urban masses looking for a temporary refuge from the harsh realities of Depression-era life.[9]

The same issue carried my article, based on research undertaken for my Honours dissertation completed at the University of Cape Town in 1989, on the Old Mutual Building in Cape Town. In this article (Freschi, 1994), I consider notions of regionalism and modernism (encapsulated in the neologism 'beautility' – at once ostensibly functional, while still being highly aestheticised) as expressed both in the structure of the building and in the iconography of its extensive decorative programmes. I argue that these forces combine to conflate corporate identity with a highly selective and one-sided construction of South African history, and thus allow its patrons to lay an unequivocal claim to legitimacy and authority. I revisit these debates in Chapter 4, where I locate them within the broader project of nationalism informed by the fusion politics of the period.

As virtually the only critical work on South African art deco architecture to be published in an international journal to that point, it is not surprising that Bevis Hillier and Stephen Escritt's discussion of the art deco style in South Africa in their lavishly produced *Art Deco Style* (1997) is informed exclusively by these two articles. Extrapolating from Martin and Freschi, they suggest that,

> Here [South Africa] was a former British colony striving to assert its commercial and political identity, which needed to be at once international and national, modern and traditional. Art Deco was the style which could resolve these potential paradoxes (Hillier and Escritt, 1997: 194).

The remainder of the text is virtually a restatement of its sources, and as such does not serve my research in any way. Of greater interest is their discussion of 1930s architecture in Latin America and particularly in Argentina, where, they suggest

[9] Although not expressed in precisely these terms, Martin's description of the extension of Hollywood-style glamour into the physical realm of the theatre through the use of fantastical ('atmospheric') ornament is an interesting case study in the self conscious creation of a quite literally imagined identity.

> An unmistakably Modern [*sic*] idiom [was] being used for the kind of propaganda purposes more often associated with European totalitarianism. The relationship between modern decoration and the newly assertive nation states of South America was unambiguous (Hillier and Escritt, 1997: 201).

The implicit suggestion that art deco-style modernism could be at once national and international, as well as the awareness of the expression of nationalism and identity in countries outside the 'traditional' realms of modernity, Europe and the United States, provides a useful foil against which to view similar projects in South Africa. In this context, Sibel Bozdoğan also provides an interesting insight into the relationship between nationalism and modernism in Turkish architecture of the 1930s in her *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (2001). She investigates the way in which the imported ideology of the European Modern Movement was "interpreted, justified, modified, and contested in ways unique to the Turkish experience" in order to "create a thoroughly Westernised, modern, and secular new nation dissociated from the country's own Ottoman and Islamic past" (Bozdoğan, 2001: 6).

The debates around the relationship between modernity and nationalism in terms of the art deco style in South Africa are tentatively revisited in an essay by Dipti Bhagat entitled "Art Deco in South Africa" in Benton, Benton and Wood's (2003) catalogue of the 2003 blockbuster exhibition, *Art Deco 1910 – 1939* at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Billed as "celebrating Art Deco, the most glamorous and popular style of the twentieth century", this exhibition aimed to reassess the significance of the art deco style as an international design phenomenon, worthy of serious scholarly attention. It did this in two ways, first by extending the period within which art deco is conventionally viewed back to 1910, rather than to the Paris exhibition of 1925, and second by devoting a considerable amount of space to the manifestations of the style beyond Europe and the United States. Bhagat's essay falls into this category of 'revisionism'. Using the 1936 Empire Exhibition as a starting point, Bhagat (2003: 419) suggests that within the "network of international belonging" that informed South Africa's hosting of the Empire Exhibition, "South Africa became less 'colonial' and increasingly 'national'." This had a significant effect on architecture, Bhagat argues, in so far as the pervasive sense of 'modernity' was as much about promoting an identity of internationalism, as it was about

asserting economic and cultural independence from the Empire. The bulk of the essay, however, is devoted to rehashing the stylistic considerations of the architectural scene in South Africa in the 1930s, once again informed largely by Marilyn Martin's and my work in the field.

I explore this complex inter-relationship among modernity, identity, and nationalism in South African architecture of the inter-war period in two further articles published in the late nineties (Freschi, 1997 and 1998). The 1997 essay traces the genealogy of stylistic change in the façade of Astor Mansions (figure 2), a Johannesburg apartment block erected in 1931, from its original beaux arts conception (figure 3) to the flamboyant expression of a quasi-New York style art deco building that finally emerged (figure 4). I argue that this building is emblematic of shifting perceptions of the nature and function of architectural ornament in 1930s' Johannesburg, establishing an unequivocal note of 'modernity' as the *sine qua non* of architectural expression in the heady atmosphere of rampant capitalism.

The 1998 article (published in a revised version in 2004) explores similar ideas in relation to the Scottish-born architect William Hood Grant who produced a significant number of buildings in the Cape Town city centre from the early teens of the twentieth century until his retirement in the early 1950s. This article traces the façades of some of Grant's (and his contemporaries') commercial buildings in Cape Town during the inter-War period. I explore the stylistic shift from the pseudo-regionalist 'Cape Dutch-Italianate' forms of the teens and 1920s (which were in turn highly derivative of Herbert Baker's South African architecture) to the flamboyant expression of modernity in terms of the art deco style of the 1930s. I contrast Grant's commercial architecture with the SANTAM and SANLAM Building (1932), designed by the Afrikaans firm of the brothers Etienne and Wynand Louw. The façade of the Louws' building incorporates decorative details of an overtly '(South) African' character. I argue that since Grant was operating from within the dominant discourse of British imperialist capitalism, his architecture is not concerned with the expression of overtly nationalistic ideals: the assumptions of cultural and political hegemony are taken for granted. Louw and Louw, on the other hand, were concerned very directly with articulating, in architectural terms, the notions of nationalism that underscored the *volkskapitalisme* of SANTAM and SANLAM, a newly constituted

Afrikaner insurance company. I pick up some of the threads of debate suggested by these articles in Chapters 2 and 4 respectively, largely by shifting the focus onto the SANTAM and SANLAM building, and viewing them in terms of the tensions between fusion politics and Afrikaner nationalism, and their respective imaginings of national belonging.

Melinda Silverman's "'Ons bou vir die Bank': Nationalism, architecture and Volkskas Bank" (in Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavić's catalogue to the exhibition *Blank: Architecture, apartheid and after*, 2000) explores the Afrikaner nationalist underpinnings of the architecture of Volkskas Bank.[10] Although the bulk of her article is devoted to the bank's architecture through the 1940s and later, she traces the political origins of the bank against the background of the social disparities between Afrikaans and English speaking South Africans in the 1930s. In these terms she shows that the ideological foundations of the bank

> included notions of industriousness and self-help, a growing sense of national identity and pride, and a nostalgic affirmation of a shared rural history. [These factors were, she goes on to argue,] … coincident with the romantic nationalism – and in some instance nationalist socialism – sweeping through both Europe and South Africa (Silverman 2000: 130).

Silverman argues that Gerhard Moerdijk was the obvious choice as architect for the first corporate headquarters in 1940, since he was by this time firmly established as one of the foremost cultural ideologues and rhetoricians of *volksargitektuur*. Notwithstanding his advocating of regional material and Cape Dutch ornament as the guiding principles of a 'pure' Afrikaans architecture, she describes the now demolished headquarters of the corporation, completed in 1940, as

> a restrained Art Deco structure, with nothing to indicate that it had aspirations to be a nationalist icon. The building had neither the ideological nor the monumental qualities that were to become evident in Moerdyk's [*sic*] later work for the volk – in the form of the Voortrekker Monument – or for the bank (Silverman 2000: 131).

I would argue, however, that the very fact of the self conscious modernity exemplified by the "restrained Art Deco" style, stripped of historical or iconographic associations, is in itself significant. It suggests to me the kind of attempt to clear the cultural slate, as it were, that Bozdoğan (2001) argues was

[10] Volkskas (literally, 'the people's treasury'), along with the insurance companies SANTAM and SANLAM were projects of Afrikaner nationalist ideologues, designed to effect the economic and social upliftment of the Afrikaner through the application of the principles of *volkskapitalisme* in the 1930s. See Chapter 4.

part of the ideological programme of the Kemalist republican regime in Turkey in the 1930s in order to inscribe a new set of cultural values. In other words, this is a clear example of the kind of 'noteworthy modernity' that Lawrence J. Vale (1999), as I discussed earlier, suggests is one of the key principles of the expression of nationalism in architectural terms. Silverman shows, however, that this modernistic restraint (and its implicit ideological agenda) was only to experience its full flowering in the bank's buildings of the 1950s and 60s. Moerdijk's next major project for the bank was the Johannesburg headquarters (completed in 1949 by Wynand Louw), which reverts to his notions of a 'pure' Afrikaans style informed by Cape Dutch architecture. Silverman provides a succinct reading of the stylistic tensions that ensue between the essentially domestic scale of the Cape Dutch style being employed, without a trace of irony, on a ten-storey office block rising sheer from the pavement.

Also in Judin and Vladislavić's *Blank: Architecture, apartheid and after* (2000), Roger Fisher presents a critical assessment of the architecture of the University of Pretoria campus as being emblematic of the ideological posturing of Afrikaner nationalism, and its concerns from the 1930s onwards at forging a national identity within a broader rubric of internationalism. The bulk of his article focuses on the campus architecture of the 1950s and 60s, but his brief discussion of Moerdijk's Merensky Library (completed 1935) is of specific interest to my thesis. Fisher shows how Moerdijk's uses of regional materials as well as iconographic elements taken from Great Zimbabwe have an overtly symbolic function traceable to Moerdijk's desire to assert an 'authentic' African (read Afrikaner) architecture. Although Fisher identifies both the iconographic sources and symbolic references of the decorative programme,[11] he does not go beyond merely implying the complexities and contradictions that result from Moerdijk's highly selective reading of the African vernacular with the desire for a universal dimension expressed in terms of modernity. I suggest in Chapter 4 that a critical deconstruction of the decorative programme of another example of modernistic *volksargitektuur*, the SANTAM/SANLAM building, has much more to yield in these terms. (In an article in which she examines the relationship between

[11] He, however, overlooks one of Moerdijk's direct quotations from Great Zimbabwe: he describes the baboons "trooping across the lintel of the door" as "symbolically obscure" and attributes their presence as perhaps being a humorous gesture on Moerdijk's part (Fisher, 2000: 222). The motif is in fact lifted directly from a carved soapstone dish discovered in the ruins (I am indebted to Anitra Nettleton for pointing this out).

regionalism and notions of identity in South African architecture Sabine Marschall (2001) suggests – somewhat problematically – that the Merensky Library is the "first example of … 'Africanising'" (Marschall, 2001: 139) in South African architecture, by which she means the intention to evoke a specifically African character. Although she makes the important point that the references to Egypt and Great Zimbabwe are "a reminder of what was perceived to be the only precedents of 'high civilisations' on the African continent" (Marschall, 2001: 142), her analysis of the decorative programme is considerably less informed than Fisher's. She is also factually incorrect in arguing that Moerdijk belonged to that school of thought that denied that Great Zimbabwe was built by local indigenous people. There is sufficient scholarship and anecdotal evidence to suggest that Moerdijk, to his credit, in fact advocated the opposite view (see Fisher (2000), Vermeulen (1999)).

This literature review has focused on three areas that are central to this thesis, namely, theories of nationalism and cultural identity, the historiography of South African modern architecture and a sparsely populated sub-category of the latter, writing on inter-World War South African architecture. What I have not examined are texts dealing more generally with South African history, nor have I considered texts dealing with the history and interpretation of architectural ornament. As these will serve largely to provide general pointers to more specific paths of enquiry, I do not engage them in any depth here, but refer to them as necessary in the text that follows.

At the centre [of colonial discourse] is not a single homogenizing perspective but a polarity: it is on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery, practice; on the other, it is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirement. – Homi Bhabha (1983: 199)

CHAPTER TWO: The fine art of fusion 1 – South Africa House, London (1933)[1]

Despite its victory in 1929, Hertzog's National Party found itself on increasingly shaky ground in the early 1930s. This was due as much to the devastating economic impact of the Great Depression, as it was to conflicting ideological forces within its ranks. Fearing for the survival of his party in the general election tabled for 1934, Hertzog thus sought an alliance with his former rival, Jan Smuts, and the latter's South African Party, itself experiencing withering support in the face of the escalating economic crisis. In March 1933, Hertzog and Smuts formed a coalition government that won the general election in May of the same year with an overwhelming majority. In December 1934, the parties merged to form the United South African National Party (commonly referred to as the United Party). Thus was born, "of a common desire to settle the constitutional relationship with the Empire and to pull South Africa out of economic crisis" (Davenport, 1991: 280), the era of 'fusion' politics and with it a new notion of what it meant to be South African: at once a nationalist and an imperialist.

In the next two chapters, I consider the ways in which the complexities underpinning this 'new' South Africanism are played out in the decorative programmes of significant public buildings erected during the early years of fusion. In this chapter, I provide a summary of the broader political and economic issues underlying fusion politics, and then examine them in relation to the decorative programme of South Africa House in London, which opened shortly after the initial Hertzog/Smuts coalition. That its opening coincided with

[1] A shorter version of this chapter has been published as 'The Fine Art of Fusion: Race, Gender, and the Politics of South Africanism in the Decorative Programme of South Africa House, London (1933)', *De Arte* 71, 2005: 14 – 34.

the establishment of this coalition was, I argue in this chapter, doubly significant, for it meant that the building, given its status as South Africa's symbolic 'home' in the heart of the metropole, inevitably entered into a complex dialectic between the competing aims of imperialism and nationalism. This nationalism was, in turn, subject to competing internal agendas. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to showing how these tensions are played out in the iconography of the building's extensive decorative programme, and how this decorative programme set the precedent for public building projects to follow.

2.1 'United in diversity': A brief history of fusion politics

Economics inevitably dictates politics. The disruptions that occurred in South African politics in the early 1930s, which were to have such far-reaching consequences, were no exception. The effect of the Great Depression on the South African economy was determined by its position in the world economy as an exporter of minerals and agricultural commodities (O'Meara, 1983: 35), and not least as a leading producer of gold. After the Wall Street crash of 1929, most countries were finding it expedient or necessary to abandon the gold standard. However, despite the plummeting exports and shrinking internal markets that were having such a deleterious effect on the economy – further exacerbated by a prolonged drought – Hertzog and his Minister of Finance, N. C. (Claas) Havenga resolutely clung to the gold standard. Although Britain, following Australia (the Union's chief rival in terms of wool exports) devalued sterling in September 1931, Havenga was nonetheless adamant in his commitment to the position that "South Africa is on the gold basis and will remain on the gold basis" (*cit.* Davenport, 1991: 274). The South African pound was thus priced well out of the market of its chief trading partners, and an already precarious situation further worsened.

Although the agricultural sector – from which the National Party traditionally took its greatest support – was hardest hit as a consequence of falling returns on export and increasing import tariffs, the government refused to compromise its position. This decision was based largely on two factors: first, on fears from the mining sector that higher import prices would force wages up, and thus cause marginal mines to close (Davenport, 1991: 274); second, out of the desire to demonstrate the Nationalist government's ability to act independently of its

imperialist master; or, as Frank Welsh (2000: 405) puts it, a case of the "colonial tail wagging the imperial dog."[2]

While the mines initially supported this policy – after all, the mining of gold was directly linked to the money form of value (O'Meara, 1983: 36) – it soon became clear that the positive effects of cheaper imports and lower internal prices were offset by increased state subsidies to the struggling agricultural sector. In effect, mining was subsidising agriculture to the detriment of both. The ensuing 'gold standard crisis' was to have far-reaching political effects. A lack of confidence in the ability of Hertzog's government to weather the economic crisis manifested itself in various ways, all of which served to destabilise a party already characterised virtually from the outset by "internal contradictions, ideological disputes and strong personal antipathies among its leadership" (O'Meara, 1983: 32).[3] Symptomatic of these problems were the loss, in a by-election, of the Pact government's stronghold of Germiston to a South African Party candidate, while Tielman Roos,[4] the erstwhile founder of the Transvaal National Party (now fostering prime ministerial ambitions) embarked on a vociferous campaign for devaluation. The latter had a startling effect. As O'Meara shows,

> Roos' lightning campaign … precipitated massive speculation and a rush to convert banknotes to gold. In three days £3m flowed out of South Africa. On Boxing Day, the Minister of Finance was informed that unless the convertability of the South African pound was terminated the commercial banks would be forced to close. A mere six days after Roos re-entered politics, South Africa left the Gold Standard (O'Meara, 1983: 42).

The result was startling: not only were currency speculators' fortunes made, but the price of gold immediately rocketed, rescuing marginal mines from certain closure, and enabling new mines to be developed (Welsh, 2000: 406).

The damage to Hertzog's party, however, was done. Widespread disenchantment with his handling of the economic crisis meant that he could no

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[2] O'Meara argues that, from the Nationalists' point of view "the issue was absurdly simple. Was the South African state, like Mary's little lamb, meekly and dutifully to tag behind every unilateral twist of imperialist policy – as Smuts and the SAP argued?" (O'Meara, 1983: 41).

[3] See O'Meara (1983), Davenport (1991), Welsh (2000), Giliomee (2003) *et al* for a detailed discussion of the history of the National Party and the effects of the gold standard crisis.

[4] Roos had resigned from the cabinet and from his post as leader of the Transvaal branch of the National Party after the 1929 election. He was subsequently appointed to the Appeal Court, from where he tried unsuccessfully (thanks to Hertzog's refusal to have anything to do with him) to return to politics. The gold standard crisis provided a perfect opportunity for him to return to political centre stage, and he lost no chance to make as much impact as possible, choosing as the date of his launch the Day of the Covenant, the highest of the holy days of Afrikaner nationalism, 16 December 1932 (O'Meara, 1983: 42).

longer be sure of an election victory in the forthcoming general election, and the idea of a coalition with Smuts's opposition South African Party – although distasteful in principle – increasingly seemed the only way to ensure political survival. Smuts, for his part, was also troubled by divisions within his ranks occasioned partly by the gold standard crisis, and partly by a schismatic movement in Natal (Davenport, 1991: 276). Coalition would thus suit his purposes well, not least in the extent to which it would bring about "a cessation of the orgy of racial politics [that is, the Boer/Brit divide] which has been the stock-in-trade of our public life" (Smuts *cit*. Davenport, 1991: 276). It would also pave the way for a South Africa more in keeping with his imperialist-friendly vision of "full sovereign status, freedom to the utmost without limit, but always in the group of comrades and friends with which we have marched hitherto in our history" (Smuts *cit*. O'Meara, 1983: 47).

Since this question of 'race' – then as now – was a primary driver in South African politics, it is worth noting here that 'racial' politics in the 1930s carried different associations than it does today. Since black South Africans did not feature in political life at all except as part of the omnipresent and vexing 'native question' (*q.v.*), the racial divide, rooted largely in the fairly recent and bitter memories of the South African War, was between the English and the Afrikaner sections of the population. Addressing the South Africa Club in London in June 1933, for example, Smuts spoke of the previous month's coalition as

> not merely a political peace … [since] … [o]wing to the complexion of the two great parties in South Africa, the long fight between them has had its tragic racial aspects. The peace therefore means also a racial peace … I do not mean that we have been at war racially, but racialism was a powerful political weapon (*South Africa*, 1933: 401).

As we shall see, the issue of race, and more specifically the union of the 'two races' was a recurrent theme in all debates relating to questions of national identity and its expression in the visual arts.

In February 1933, Hertzog and Smuts agreed to a coalition based on seven principles. As I show in the subsequent chapters, all of these were to find expression, in one way or another, in the decorative programmes of public buildings. These included the maintenance of sovereign independence as defined

in the Statute of Westminster;[5] the acceptance and maintenance of the Union flag;[6] equal language rights; the protection of the agricultural sector; the acceptance of a 'civilised' (that is, white) labour policy; the solution of the 'native question'; and the protection of the economy (O'Meara, 1983: 45; Davenport, 1991: 276). The coalition was ratified based on the above principles 15 March 1933.

Some issues, however, remained to be resolved before full amalgamation of the two parties could be achieved. Principle amongst these were the issues of sovereignty (there was a strong lobby, particularly from D. F. Malan and the Cape branch of the National Party for secession from the Commonwealth, opposed both by Smuts and, to a lesser extent by Hertzog) and the 'native question', or the extent to which the franchise would be extended to blacks. The former was resolved by enacting the principles of the Statue of Westminster, which governed issues of sovereign independence of the dominions, and effectively granted South Africa legal autonomy in exercising all acts of state. While this was no guarantee of secession, it served to mollify, for the time being, the more moderate elements in the National Party. (Not so, however, for Malan and the die-hard republicans, who formed the official opposition *Gesuiwerde* ('Purified') National Party, which advocated a severing of all ties with the Commonwealth and the creation of a white supremacist republic). A compromise was reached on the question of the black franchise, whereby the land acquisition programmes first mooted in terms of Hertzog's 1925 draft bills would be maintained, but with a new proposal to abolish the Cape Franchise entirely and to install a Native Representative Council to service (that is, effectively to suppress) black political interests.

The full amalgamation of the two parties into the United South African Nationalist Party (or United Party) was finalised in December 1934. The principles under which this fusion would take place were, however, already well-rehearsed by the middle of 1933 and would be thrust into the international spotlight by the opening, two months after the initial coalition, of the new

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[5] Enacted by the British Parliament in 1931, the Statute of Westminster established the dominions as an association of independent states within the Commonwealth of Nations. Although united by a common allegiance to the Crown, dominion parliaments were, in terms of the Statute, now empowered to reject any law of the British Parliament, and to enact all domestic legislation, including – if sufficient majority could be achieved – secession.

[6] See Giliomee (2003: 398) for a discussion of the fraught politics underlying the issue of a national flag.

premises of the South African High Commission[7] in the heart of the imperial metropole.

2.2 'A monument to concord and amity': South Africa House

The official opening on 22 June 1933 of South Africa House on London's Trafalgar Square was the occasion of as much pomp and ceremony as the increasingly beleaguered[8] British Empire could muster (figure 5). "No more brilliant function," wrote *The South African Builder*'s Own Correspondent (1933a: 14), "has been seen in London this season:

> Bright sunshine attended Their Majesties [King George V and Queen Mary] as they drove from Buckingham Palace to Trafalgar Square in an open coach drawn by four horses. … With Their Majesties in the carriage was Lieutenant-General J.C. Smuts, as Minister in Attendance, this being the first occasion on which a Dominion Minister has been accorded the honour while attending Great Britain.

After ceremoniously unlocking the door with a gold key presented by the architect, Sir Herbert Baker, and running the gamut of petty snobberies demanded of imperialist protocol, their majesties and the assembled guests – comprising the *crème* of British, South African, and foreign diplomatic and political circles – were addressed by the High Commissioner, Charles Te Water.[9] Acknowledging the presence of both high-ranking British and South African government officials,[10] Te Water took the opportunity to present a homily on the virtues of fusion politics: "It is a coincidence of much interest and significance and of the most fortunate augury," he enthused,

> that [the presence of these dignitaries] as representatives of a country politically united for the first time in its strenuous history should synchronise with the throwing open of the doors of South Africa House to the world. The new South Africa House may, therefore, in truth be

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[7] After Act of Union in 1910 the four Agents General of Cape, Natal, Orange Free State, and Transvaal merged into the High Commission under Richard Soloman. During and after World War I there was a considerable expansion of bureaucracy (in direct proportion to South Africa's growing wealth and industrialisation) and larger quarters were called for. The High Commission thus acquired the present site – a wedge between the Strand, Trafalgar Square, and Duncannon Street – on a 99-year lease from October 1930. Construction of South Africa House took little more than two years, from January 1931 until June 1933, when the new building officially opened (see South Africa House, n.d.; Leighton, n.d.; Barson, 2000).

[8] After the First World War Britain's status as the world's financier was irrevocably altered. Britain was now a debtor of the United States, while the Empire was under intense pressure not only from aggressive United States economic imperialism, but also from increasingly strident nationalism within its colonies and dominions.

[9] A staunch Smuts man, Charles Te Water held the post of High Commissioner in London from 1929 to 1939. He was elected President of the League of Nations in 1933.

[10] Other distinguished guests included the British Prime Minister and cabinet members, High Commissioners of other dominions, as well as a glittering array of lesser royals, ambassadors, and sundry diplomats.

> described as the home in London of a united South African nation; the symbol of a happy and auspicious event in its people's history; and the visible reflection of the determination of Your Majesty's subjects in that Dominion to live in amity and complete accord (Own Correspondent, 1933a: 14).

Amplifying this theme, the King in turn remarked in his official opening address[11] that the new building, "beautified … with treasures drawn from your country's historical and truly strenuous past [*sic*]… [stands] witness of a new epoch throughout all that vast subcontinent which is now, indeed, the Union of South Africa" (Own Correspondent, 1933a: 14). "The problems", he continued,

> within the comity of our Empire are many and grave. Some of them have been solved by such far-seeing statesmanship as that of General Hertzog … who has set the seal of unity upon your nation … It gives me great pleasure now to declare South Africa House open, a monument to concord and amity (Own Correspondent, 1933a: 14).

From the outset, then, South Africa House was ascribed a symbolic significance greatly in excess of its literal bureaucratic functions. Its location on Trafalgar Square along with other 'empire houses' not only placed it unequivocally in the literal and symbolic heart of the British imperialist establishment, but also provided a highly visible platform from which notions of a South African cultural identity, informed by notions of unity in diversity, could be promoted.

2.3 'Romance and history': the Baker/Te Water vision

By the time he came to work on the design for South Africa House, Herbert Baker's reputation as the architect laureate of the British empire, in all but official title, was in no doubt. From the Union Buildings in Pretoria to the Secretariat in New Delhi, government buildings in Kenya and Rhodesia, dominion war memorials at Delville Wood, and four important 'empire' buildings in London (South Africa House, India House, the Royal Empire Society, and London House, a hostel for dominion students), Baker's particular brand of hybrid classicism had the same result. It created the illusion of calm dignity and grandeur on the surface of an increasingly querulous and unwieldy colonial administration struggling with the conflicting demands of modernity, tradition, and nationalism.

As I have suggested in Chapter 1, the desired effect was one of monumentality in the Western classical tradition, tempered with just enough regional flavour to

[11] Both the King's as well as the High Commissioner's opening addresses can still be read in the building's foyer, inscribed on platinum plaques set into the wall.

naturalise it in the eyes of the local subjects (Foster, 2004: 270). The resultant style – succinctly characterised by Edwin Lutyens as 'an Englishman dressed for the climate' – thus affirmed cultural links with the metropole, whilst simultaneously appropriating, manipulating, or inventing 'native' traditions in order to validate colonial authority.[12] In New Delhi, for example, this meant the selective appropriation of Mughal forms, grafted onto "the eternal principles of the ordered beauty of classical architecture" (Baker, 1944: 71). This would ostensibly result, as Baker put it in a letter to Lutyens outlining his vision for the new capital, in an architecture that would "not be Indian, nor English, nor Roman, but … Imperial. In two thousand years there must be an Imperial Lutyens tradition in Indian architecture … Hurrah for despotism!" (Grant, 981: 223). For his part, Lutyens had little patience with indigenous Indian architecture, particularly as regarded the pointed arch. "One cannot tinker with the rounded arch," he wrote. "God did not make the Eastern rainbow pointed to show His wide sympathies" (Stamp, 1981: 37). In effect, as Mark Crinson (2003: 12) notes, the Indian references are pushed to the insignificant margins of the composition where they are in no danger of destabilising the grand narrative of imperial classicism, but rather, participate calmly within it.

Baker's excitement about the 'Imperial Lutyens tradition' notwithstanding, the two *eminences grises* of the British architectural establishment were later to come to blows over the details of the New Delhi project (see Baker, 1944; Grant, 1981). For Baker, it was a question of the fundamental design ethos. In a coy explanation of the reasons for the rift, Baker declared in his autobiography (1944: 88) that where Lutyens tended more towards "abstract monumental design" he personally placed more importance on "sentiment."

Certainly, a great deal of 'sentiment' informs his important commissions in South Africa, not least in the Union Buildings, the seat of the colonial government, and a prominent symbol of the union of the "two [white] races of South Africa" (Baker, 1944: 61). Baker thus married the Cape Dutch-inspired

[12] See Cannadine (2001) for a discussion of the spectacle of imperialism, which he characterises as 'ornamentalism'. He argues that the British imperialist system was not so much about race as it was about class and status, played out in a spectacle of pomp and ceremony designed to impress and intimidate local rulers.

classicism pioneered at Rhodes's Cape Town residence Groote Schuur[13] with explicit references to Italian Renaissance villas. The 'sentiment' at play thus imbues the building with a desirable sense of (pseudo-)regionalism that speaks as much to the values of the Afrikaner component of its constituency, as to the imperialist imaginary exemplified by Cecil Rhodes' Cape-to-Cairo fantasy, or what Peter Merrington describes as a 'cultural matrix' which

> generated a particular founding myth for the colonial state of the Union of South Africa in 1910 and which also lent to foreign visitors, tourists, and immigrants a readily understood interpretation of South Africa and the Cape as 'Mediterranean' rather than as 'African' (Merrington, 2001: 323).

Furthermore, the stylistic tensions that result from the references to what are essentially domestic architectural traditions, expressed in terms of the grand gesture of imperialist classicism, makes a clear statement about the subordination of the local and the specific to the generalised and authoritarian,[14] smugly packaged in the unassailable rhetoric of 'home'.

South Africa House, with its irresistible allure as the metaphorical 'home' of the colony in the literal 'home' of the metropole, thus presented a unique opportunity to express the 'sentiment' of South Africa. It is, consequently, not surprising that Baker's original conception of the façade was therefore based on the Cape Dutch/Italianate model in the form of an attic tiled roof dominated by a gable above the inevitable Corinthian portico (figure 6). This proposal, however, was rejected by the city's Fine Arts Commission on the basis that it would be out of keeping with the style and scale of Trafalgar Square, dominated, as it is, by the neoclassical façades of the National Gallery and St. Martin's in the Field. He

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[13] *South Africa House, London: A Short Description*, an undated mimeographed document (presumably written shortly after the completion of the building, and before the completion of the 'Zulu Room' (*q.v.*) in 1938) goes so far as to say that "Baker can truly be said to have been the discoverer of the beauty of the old Dutch Homesteads of the Cape" (South Africa House, n.d.: 2).

[14] Melinda Silverman (2000) makes a similar point in her discussion of Moerdijk's design for the Johannesburg headquarters of Volkskas Bank (completed by Louw in 1949), where she describes, as I have noted above, the stylistic tensions that ensue between the essentially domestic scale of the Cape Dutch style being employed on a ten-storey office block rising sheer from the pavement. Like Moerdijk, and for similar – albeit politically opposed – reasons, Baker seemed oblivious to any implicit irony in the disparity between the monumental and the domestic. After all, he was committed to "the humblest work of the old builders who have followed the traditional methods of their forefathers" (Baker, 1944: 177) coupled with symbolically loaded decorative details that "[form] some vital and significant expression of human interest and experience" (Baker, 1944: 177) as the necessary condition of architecture. This is interesting in that it flies somewhat in the face of conventional contemporary notions of civic decorum and status embedded in architectural scale and location. The deliberate engagement of domestic elements for important national buildings is thus unusual, and, I would argue, points directly to the perceived urgency of the need (first by Baker, and later by Moerdijk and the Louws) to create an imaginary of 'belonging' that is firmly bound up with the ineluctable rhetoric of 'home'. In this way, the tensions between imperial 'space' and colonial 'place' could be successfully – if somewhat patronisingly – resolved.

was thus enjoined to design a balustraded, flat-roofed attic, with an inset pediment supported by two Ionic columns in place of the gable. Although he wrote shortly after the building's completion that the view of the building forms "an harmonious and beautiful composition" (Baker, 1933a: 11) with the architecture of the square,[15] the enforced change to his design remained an unhappy compromise, primarily because it negated the sentiment of 'home'. "We had to consent for the sake of the greater issue" he wrote later, "to my great regret, as I consider the tile roof would have given the best expression to the House or Home of the Dominion in the Mother City of the Empire" (Baker, 1944: 132).

No such constraints were applied, however, at the level of detail, either on the façade or in the interior finishes. "Throughout the design of the building," Baker wrote, "the aim of the architect has been to eliminate all decoration which has not special significance for South Africa" (Baker, 1933a: 13). The propagandistic potential of this was not lost on the High Commissioner, whose tireless commitment to the project of creating a cultural symbol worthy of a "united South African nation" (Own Correspondent, 1933a: 14) seemed to be rivalled only by his ability to prevail upon his extensive business connections to donate funds for the lavish decorative programme. This included – in addition to the sculptures on the façade and the commissioned artworks – furniture, tapestries, heraldic devices, and other decorative elements custom-made to Baker's designs (figure 7). Baker, for his part, was delighted with the extent to which Te Water championed his vision for the building. "In the High Commissioner," he wrote later, "I had a willing and generous supporter of my endeavour to express the romance and history of South Africa through the medium of art" (Baker, 1944: 132).

The 'sentiment' informing these designs was thus, by Baker's own telling, a highly romanticised one, and the consequent evocation of an African Arcadia is expressed as much through the iconography as through the use of indigenous materials, albeit in ways that evoke the western European classical tradition,

[15] Not all viewers agreed. *The South African Builder* of February 1933 quotes *Country Life* as reporting that "[n]ow that South Africa House approaches completion, it is evident to all amateurs of urban decency that the harmony and dignity of old Trafalgar Square have been pitilessly destroyed. In place of symmetry has arisen a conflict of ill-calculated levels" (Own Correspondent, 1933b: 17). The doyen of British architectural history, Nikolaus Pevsner, also took issue (see Keath, n.d.).

rather than in ways that resonate with any sense of a *genius loci*. In these terms, the 'romance' of South Africa is conflated with notions of indigenousness, expressed in terms of representations of fauna and flora: low-relief sculpted protea, mimosa, and crinum share the façade with elephant, wildebeest, lion, and antelope (figure 8), while balusters and grilles throughout the building feature stylised proteas and springbok (figure 9). "Wherever possible", wrote Baker, "we used material from the Union, various marbles in the entrance-halls, and rare woods, such as the ebony-like stinkwood of which the old Cape furniture is made, and the precious tambootie, on the walls and in the furniture" (Baker, 1944: 132).

The romantic evocation of indigenousness is given its most fanciful expression in the gilded figure of a flying springbok, modelled and cast in bronze by Charles Wheeler[16] (Baker's sculptor-of-choice, who was responsible for most of the sculptural work on the building) projecting from the semi-circular corner of the building (figure 10). For Baker this figure was an elegant solution to his need to find "some general symbol that would typify South Africa more vividly than the emblem of the Protea" (Baker, 1944: 133). Based on the design of a golden Persian sculpture of a winged oryx in the Louvre, the image resonated as much with his need for an autochthonous reference point, as with his conviction that "winged figures are perhaps the most sublime of all symbols", since they allow the imagination to "rise to heaven" (Baker, 1944: 178). The springbok had the added virtue of already being a recognisable emblem:

> The badge of the springbok, first taken by the South African football players, is tending to become a national symbol, and it is thought that to give it the wings of imagination will establish it on a higher plane in the spiritual symbolism of South Africa (Baker, 1933a: 15).

An icon in the elaborate cosmogony of a civil religion sanctioned by empire, the winged springbok appears throughout the building (figure 11) as a constant reminder of the leap of imagination required to effect what he would later term the "consummation of the fuller union of the two races [of South Africa]" (Baker, 1944: 192). The popular Afrikaans press, however, took a less exalted view. *Die Huisgenoot* (1934: 13) noted scathingly that in some circles it was being described as a *hottentotsgotspringbok*; a 'praying mantis springbok'.

No evocation of Arcadia, however, could be complete without references to its mythology, and for Baker the dividing line between history and myth tended to

[16] Sir Charles Wheeler RA (1892 – 1974).

blur, especially where the exalted aims of empire were at stake. South Africa House is thus decorated with an abundance of fanciful heraldic devices, gilded inscriptions, escutcheons, and decorative maps, ostensibly in the service of 'history', but which on closer scrutiny construct an elaborate mythology of promised riches, celestial interventions, and superhuman heroism that would not be out of place in a Rider Haggard novel. The theme of colonial conquest is doggedly reiterated, starting with sculptural elements on the façade. The Union's coat-of-arms and an emblematic depiction of the Southern Cross intertwined with an anchor are carved above the main entrance archway (figure 12). These represent, respectively, the "divine symbol in the sky which blazed [the] trail [of early navigators] to the eastern seas" and to whose use South Africa therefore "has a prior right" (Baker, 1933a: 13), and the Cape of Good Hope, "the name with which the King of Portugal christened the famous Cape after Dias' return" (Baker, 1933a: 13). Below them, a springbok with a sun-disc between its horns stands as "a tribute to the sunshine which visitors seek in South Africa" (BaH 30/4: 14 March 1933). Higher up, in the pediment, is a ship in full sail (figure 13), framed by the inscription 'good hope', representing the "*Goede Hoop* which carried Jan van Riebeeck, the first European Governor, to the Cape of Good Hope" (South Africa House, n.d.: 3).

Further along the façade, in a niche near the corner of the Strand, Coert Steynberg's sculpture of a stout-legged Bartholomeu Dias fixes his stony gaze in perpetuity on Nelson's column (figure 14). Here, as elsewhere in the decorative programme, Baker's 'sentiment' – supported by Te Water – prevailed over the wishes of other stakeholders, in this case Hertzog and Smuts who, from the outset, both favoured Jan van Riebeeck, the ostensible "forerunner to the present civilisation in this country" (BaH 31/3: 22 September 1931) as the preferred occupant of the niche. For Baker, however, a Dutch official – no matter how celebrated – could not compete in sheer romance with "the first European to brave the Atlantic storms and sail around the Cape towards the Indian Ocean" (Baker, 1944: 133). Besides which Van Riebeeck had been sufficiently honoured, according to Baker, by Rhodes "in the [bronze] relief at Groote Schuur and the statue at Capetown [*sic*] on the shore where he landed" (Baker, 1944: 133), a plaster copy of which graces the walls of the gallery above the entrance vestibule in South Africa House (*q.v.*).

Baker went so far as to petition Hertzog, pleading the case for the recognition of Dias as the 'Columbus' of South Africa, and drawing attention to the exalted links to a noble European lineage. "The discovery by Diaz of the Cape sea-way to the East", he wrote to the Prime Minister (BaH 31/3: 12 November 1931),

> led to the diversion of the whole of the trade and sea-power of Europe from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, and to the Western powers of Portugal, Holland, France and England, – a momentous fact in history to which S[outh] Africa owes its origins. It is perhaps a mistake, too, to think racially of the great early navigators [this crossed out with a pencilled note in the margin 'note deleted at the H[igh] C[ommissioner's] wish 17.11.31']. The early navigators, were the great Adventurers of the seafaring nations of Europe, with the energy infused by northern blood and inspired by the training and example of Henry the Navigator, who himself descended from Norman ancestry. … It would seem therefore to be a fine historical gesture to honour the South African 'Columbus' in the capital of the sea-power which grew out of the germ of his discovery.

Here Baker is clearly promoting what Peter Merrington (2001: 324) has identified as

> a complex of strategic imperial factors … [whereby] the Mediterranean [was seen in the early decades of the twentieth century as] the origin of the world's peoples, religions, and cultures. There is a self-gratifying genealogy whereby the northern races lay claim to the legacy of the Mediterranean and then spread the word to the unfortunates of other regions and races.

Baker's campaign was relentless. Reporting to J. S. Clelland, the Secretary of the Department of Public Works, on his letter to the Prime Minister he wrote:

> The substance of my letter is that Diaz was the 'Columbus' of South Africa and had as great an effect on history as Columbus himself; whereas Van Riebeck, as the symbol of civilised government at the Cape, is more rightly honoured where he has been honoured on the foreshaw [*sic*] and at Groote Schuur (BaH 31/3: 12 November 1931).

Te Water, in thrall to Baker's heroic vision, and advocating a "historically truthful scheme of symbolism" took up his case with Hertzog. "Would it not, then," he in turn wrote to the Prime Minister (BaH 31/3: 16 November 1931),

> be a fine thing to seize this unique opportunity, and to make a commencement in restoring to the memory of the world the adventurous deeds of one of the greatest navigators of all times, and an episode, which is a landmark in the world of discovery? 1486 is a date known to every South African child, but the world outside has forgotten it. It is from this point in time that south African history dates. . . . Van Riebeek has not for a moment been forgotten in our scheme of symbolism … Thus will be commemorated two great episodes in our history. Outside will be the figure of the mariner whose discovery meant so much to the world; inside will be the first governor, whose advent saw the beginning of what may, for the purpose, be described as our 'Domestic' history.

Hertzog was not to be swayed. Two months later the reply came, "after consultation with the Honourable the Minister of the Interior [D. F. Malan] it has been decided to abide by the previous decision, *viz*, that preference be given to a statue of Van Riebeeck" (BaH 31/3: 12 February 1932). With hindsight, we can now see that Hertzog and his Ministers were clinging tenaciously to what, after 1948, would become, as I have noted in Chapter 1, one of the central constructs of Afrikaner nationalism, Van Riebeeck as the 'founding father' of the Afrikaner people. This was to reach its apotheosis in the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Celebrations of 1952, which provided the newly installed 'purified' Nationalist government the perfect opportunity to lay the claim of *volksplanting* unequivocally at Van Riebeeck's feet.

In this regard, Rassool and Witz (1992: 5) suggest that Van Riebeeck did not occupy a particularly significant place in South African history before the 1940s, except in the extent to which he was a useful trope for the notion of reformed Christianity (*q.v.*) and Dutch-South African relations. "By the 1940s", they argue,

> South Africa had a weak national history. Historical figures were not accorded national prominence; events were not recorded as national South African milestones; there was no historical progression towards the accomplishments of nationhood.

I do not entirely agree with this assessment. The plethora of imagery devoted to the construction of a history of 'unity in diversity' to which this investigation is devoted, for example, would suggest that in the 1930s a great deal of precisely this kind of construction of national history was going on. The example of South Africa House in particular would seem to suggest that this 'progression' was in fact taking place by the early 1930s. Baker, in fact, seems to be responding precisely to the challenge of identifying historical milestones on the path to nationhood. As he put it to the British High Commissioner in South Africa,

> Columbus has had his due share of honour and Diaz none, and I think it would have been a fine gesture to put a Diaz statue in the capital of the sea power which resulted from Diaz' discovery. But the govt. [*sic*] stick to their Riebeck [*sic*] (BaH 31/3: 29 June 1932).

Although Baker would have preferred to give the job of producing the statue to Wheeler, it was also decided that a competition should be held amongst South African sculptors for the honour. Shortly after the young sculptor Coert

Steynberg[17] was chosen from the eleven entrants (including, *inter alia*, Anton van Wouw, Moses Kottler, Mary Stainbank, and Ivan Mitford-Barberton), the news came in March 1933 that Hertzog had capitulated and agreed to endorse Te Water's decision about the statue. (This is hardly surprisingly, given that March was the month of the greatest political turmoil of the fusion saga, and Hertzog clearly had more pressing issues to worry about.) As Baker noted in his diary (BaH 31/3: 22 March 1933), "[Te Water] said the Prime Minister preferred Van Riebeck [*sic*] but was kind about it and said that the High Commissioner had better have done it without asking him. Malan was rather opposed to it but would not decide as he was leaving the Ministry". Baker's vision had prevailed. To Steynberg he wrote, "this work … has now been lifted, I think, into a more interesting and romantic subject which will give scope for a higher idealistic treatment"[18] (BaH 31/3: 23 March 1933). Thus was suppressed an incipient reference to Afrikaner nationalism in favour of a nobler – and more romantic – notion of the heroic imperialist gaze.[19]

The mythic conquest of the land is given further symbolic resonance in the various escutcheons, emblems and inscriptions that Baker adopted, modified, or invented in order to celebrate the civilising mission of the European conquest of the African continent. This is particularly evident in the two most important public thresholds, namely, the vestibule off the main entrance, and that leading to the basement Kinema, a purpose-built cinema and theatre with a small stage. The two domes in the entrance, like the two towers of the Union Buildings, represent the union of the Boer republics and the British colonies. To this end, each dome and its pendentives is decorated with suitable symbols (figure 15). The one bears the seals and coats of arms of the Boer republics, and is inscribed with the Union motto 'UNITY IS STRENGTH' in English and Afrikaans. The other bears those of the British colonies, with the inscription 'FLORENTI FAMA ATQUE OPIBUS AFRICAE MERIDIONALIS CIVITATI VEL MAIUS

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[17] Coert Steynberg (1905 – 1985). See Berman (1983) and the artist's autobiography (Steynberg, 1982) for more information on the South Africa House commission.

[18] In the same letter, he virtually orders Steynberg to work with Wheeler on the statue: "… You will also decide what studio you will work in, but I wonder if it would be possible for you to make some arrangement with Mr. Wheeler to work in his studio. I just throw out this suggestion" (BaH 31/3: 23 March 1933).

[19] The appeal to a popular heroism is reinforced, I would argue, by Baker's remark that Steynberg, like Wheeler, preferred to "chisel the resisting stone than to mould the yielding clay" (Baker 1944: 133).

INCREMENTUM DET DEUS' (To This State of South Africa, Flourishing in Reputation and in its Resources, May God Give Even Greater Increase).

The choice of this inscription was the subject of some debate, the substance of which gives a taste of the heady cocktail of *Realpolitik* and myth that informed Baker's vision for the building. In first sketching out ideas for the inscription, his intention was to include, in the Roman triumphal tradition, a reference both to Hertzog and to King George V. In a letter (BaH 30/7: 28 January 1932) to a Dr. M. J. Rendall, a Latin scholar and heraldic expert whom he consulted on the subject of these inscriptions, he wrote,

> I at first thought of putting 'This House in the Capital of the British Empire' but I think this too would be provocative to one who – or at least through his followers – does not like to think there is a British Empire [and suggests] HAEC DOMUS HONOR(EM) ET FORTU(AM) MERIDEI AFRICAE ET IMPERII BRITTANIAE DUCE HERTZOG COMMULE ET IN GEORGII QUINTI REGNO IN PERPETU(UM) COMMENDAT MXMXXXIII [This House Honours and Commends the Flourishing of South Africa and the British Empire Under the Leadership of Hertzog and in the Reign of King George V 1933].

Rendall's reply (BaH 30/7: 31 January 1932) was prompt and to the point.

> It seems to me that we must, if possible, omit Hertzog: name and office are both difficult in Latin. You want a date somewhere – this I have supplied (incidentally: you can add MCMXXXII if you like) – if the Union dates from May 1910 it sho[uld] be 22nd year, till May next year 23rd. Are we to cut out 'in the British Empire' entirely? You were unwise to put it in *separately*.

He then listed a number of possibilities, predominantly around the notion of unity: COMMEMORAT HAEC DOMUS STABILITUM INTER BRITANNOS ET BATAVOS IN AFRICA MERID: CONCORDIAM: QUAM DEUS SEMPITERNAM FACIAT [This House Commemorates the Building of Harmony Between British and Dutch in South Africa. May God Make This Harmony Eternal]. "Is this saying too much?" he added, suggesting also: COMMEMORAT HAEC DOMUS CONCORDIAM DUE POPULORUM IN REPUBLIC AFRICAE MERID[IONALIS] IAM PER XXII ANNOS FELICITER DURANTEM (This House Commemorates the Harmony of the Two Peoples in the Republic of South Africa That Has Lasted Happily for 22 Years). Finally, he suggested COMMEMORAT DOMUS HAEC FLORENTAM IAM PER XXII ANNOS DUE GENTIUM IN AFRICA MERID: SOCIETATEM – A.D. MCMXXII (This House Commemorates the Flourishing for Twenty Two Years of the Society of Two Peoples in South Africa). Wise to Baker's notions of sentiment, but clearly rather

naïve regarding South African politics, he concluded, "Perhaps you want fact rather than fancy! Could they take exception to *duo* gentium, omitting the natives?"

Baker's reply (BaH 30/7: 2 February 1932) to these suggestions is interesting in the extent to which it exposes the fraught position that the South Africa House-in-the-making was occupying in South African domestic affairs, particularly in so far as it was seen (by the Nationalists) as a stage on which to act out notions of economic and cultural independence. "I am afraid, however, much as we may like the expressions of 'good will' such as you suggest," he wrote by return of post,

> that they are not what will be accepted by the South African government. I think its opinion will be that this House is there not or primarily not to promote good will between the two nations but rather that it is for the 'ambassador' of an independent nation and a consul-general for trade relations. … I think your point of view would have some sympathy with Te Water and if he could talk directly with Hertzog it is possible that he might convince him, but the decision will probably made by other members of the Cabinet who would take an independent national point of view. Te Water has to be very careful and wisely does not want to cause any controversy or opposition.

Unconvinced, Rendall (BaH 30/7: 3 February 1932) replied with a new suggestion: COMMEMORAT HAEC DOMUS DUE GENTIUM CONCORDIAM: QUAM DEUS AETERNAM FACIAT (This House Commemorates the Concord of Two Peoples: May God Make It Everlasting). Baker, torn between his imperialist sentiments and the wishes of his patrons, remained insistent:

> I think your last lines are splendid as expressing the sentiment of you and me and those who are so politically minded, but I am afraid they are not what the present South African Government, whether they feel it or not, want to express in South Africa House.

Unencumbered by the same constraints that were guiding Baker's approach to the subject, Rendall's reply, marked 'Private and Confidential' was unsparing in its indictment of any implicit nationalist sympathies:

> Sorry to trouble you so much about South Africa House. But I simply cannot believe that any one can wish to write on its home such words as 'S.A. is great and wealthy under Hertzog'. It simply isn't done! I crave for a note of aspiration or humility somewhere … If Hertzog comes in at all, it must be as (?) *Jan* or *John* Hertzog (is that right?), e.g. DOMUS HAEC FLORENTEM DUCE IOH[ANNIS] HERTZOG AFRICAE MERID: REPUBLICAM BRITANNIAE REPRAESENTAT (This House 'represents' to Britain, i.e. brings before the eyes of Britain, the country of S. Africa, happy under its rule). But why, why, lug in Hertzog? He might be out next year! You would not put 'in the Premiership of Baldwin or Macdonald'! Surely I am right in this. It is quite different with a King – I

> wish to pay all honour to the country and don't mind keeping the Empire out: but ….

While Rendall was, to a certain extent, correct in his assessment that Hertzog – or at least the particular breed of nationalism that Hertzog represented – would be 'out' the next year, the extant inscription nonetheless seemed to mollify all parties. While it studiously ignored any references to individual leaders or the newfound amity of former foes, it seemed to strike an acceptable balance between lofty sentiment and worldly resources and thus speak to both constituencies: those who, like Baker and Rendall (and to a limited extent Te Water), wished to celebrate the colonial 'home' in the imperial metropole, as well as those who, like Hertzog (and to a considerably lesser extent Smuts), wished to celebrate the relative autonomy that South Africa enjoyed by dint of its peculiar history and natural resources.

Avoiding the fraught nature of inscriptions, Baker chose to decorate the dome of the hall outside the Kinema with four escutcheons of his own invention in which strands of history, myth, mysticism and divine sanction are woven together to reinforce the inevitability of colonial conquest (figure 16). "What beautiful symbols South Africa, for lack of historical imagination, has missed," he enthused in a letter to Te Water (BaH 30/7: 9 February 1932), "the Southern Cross, the Navigators' Cross, and the Star in the East for Natal." True to form, he lost no time in compensating for this historical oversight. The Dutch and Portuguese sailors' quest of the oceans is guided and sanctioned by the Southern Cross, while an allegorical female figure stands on the prow of a ship, its figurehead a Madonna and Child, "holding a sail with a single star which might signify the Star of the East in reference to the historical fact that Dias reached and named Natal on Christmas Day" (Baker, 1944: 15). The Boers' conquest of the interior is represented by the "Mountains of the Moon and the Source of the Nile" (Baker, 1944: 15) – a reference to early Trekkers who believed that at Nylstroom they had found the source of the Nile – with a Bible, rifle and powder horn, and ox wagon. The by then conventionalised construct of the mythic suffering and heroism of the Voortrekkers in pursuit of their Promised Land[20] is

[20] Regarding the construction of the Voortrekker myth, see *inter alia* Du Toit (1983) and Hofmeyr (1987 and 1988); for the depiction of this mythologising in public art and architecture see Delmont (1993), Van der Watt (1998), Freschi (1994 and 2004a).

thus given, in the reference to the 'Mountains of the Moon and the source of the Nile' an added gloss of mysticism in the service of 'history and romance'.

Escutcheons and heraldic shields reiterating these themes of mythical conquest and glory are found throughout the building, particularly in the Reading Room and the Kinema. While much care and attention has been lavished on finding appropriate and diverse symbols for "the various races that have been concerned with the history of the Union of South Africa" (South Africa House, n.d.: 24), the indigenous peoples of the subcontinent are subsumed into the 'native races.' The latter are given a token acknowledgement in the form of an escutcheon featuring a beehive hut surmounted by two crossed assegais and shields (figure 17). Baker's original intention was to elide references to aboriginal races with those of 'Missionaries and Hunters', both of which provided more scope for the 'history and romance' of the intrepid European's conquest of the continent. Te Water's office, while favouring the introduction of the image of the Bible in relation to the 'natives' insisted however that "natives … be included by introducing assegai and native shields" (BaH 30/6: 22 June 1932). Clearly uncomfortable with including the Bible in this context, Baker wrote to Te Water's office, "for the Kaffir symbols I am inclined to miss out the Bible. Should we not rather have kraals and perhaps crossed assegais with the same significance as crossed swords?"

Initially there was also some discussion around including a motto, as had been done with all the other escutcheons, for the 'native races' escutcheon in the Reading Room. A. L. Albright, Te Water's Confidential Secretary, first suggested "HLANGANISA. UnXosa [sic] word for 'defend thyself'" (BaH 30/6: 12th April 1933), but promptly rejected this idea after discussing it with Te Water, who was "definitely of the opinion that that word is not appropriate – for political and other reasons" (BaH 30/6: 20th April 1933). Later on the Secretary of the Department of Native Affairs submitted two other alternatives, "ITEMBA ALIDANISI meaning Hope does not disappoint; [and] UMZINGISI AKNASHWA meaning He who perseveres is not put to shame" (BaH 30/6: 5th September 1933), the latter being favoured by the High Commissioner. In the end, nothing came of this, and the assegai-and-shield escutcheon appears uncaptioned throughout the building; in retrospect the facts of what it represents – the aspirations of black South Africans – omnipresent by their absence.

Thus, Baker's construction of South Africa as viewed through the lens of its ostensible 'history and romance' says more about the greedy gaze of the imperialist – what Homi Bhabha identifies as the "site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements" at the heart of colonial discourse (Bhabha, 1983: 199) – than about any kind of lived experience of the country. To a contemporary audience, however, these things unequivocally signified 'Africa', or at least conformed to received notions of what constituted 'South Africa'.[21] As the King put it in his opening address, "Sir Herbert Baker's genius has housed these gifts in a building which renders the spirit of your land with a completeness that only insight and long devotion to South Africa could achieve" (Own Correspondent, 1933a: 14).

2.4 'A fine and fertile country': The mural commissions

Baker generally took a dim view of mural decoration, arguing that

> [c]ollaboration between the architect and the artists who paint on his walls may be as important as between those who sculpture [*sic*] upon them … [A]rchitecture as a whole depends less upon the mural painter than upon the sculptor (Baker, 1944: 172).

Nonetheless, it had been decided from the outset that mural painting would play a significant role in the decoration of the High Commission (Baker, 1933a and 1944; BaH 30/7: 27 May 1930). It was felt that such paintings would serve, in the words of the first Heads of Agreement (see Appendix 1) drawn up between the High Commission and Baker's office, "to express also somehow the spirit which has always possessed South Africa, i.e., the yearning for Freedom – the Spirit of high adventure – the facing of difficulties in order to overcome them – the hope for the future" (BaH 30/7: 27 May 1930). To this end, Te Water prevailed upon several of his contacts to sponsor artworks by South African artists, including J. H. Pierneef, Jan Juta, and Gwelo Goodman, or by artists who, like J. H. Amshewitz, had a strong connection with South Africa. Te Water and Baker did not share the same views regarding the finished products. To Baker (1944: 134),

> much of the painting on the walls of South Africa House is not equal to the high quality of the sculpture … one felt that these artists, with the exception of Piernief [*sic*. Pierneef had completed a substantial mural

[21] Anne E. Coombes (2004: 282) amplifies this point in her discussion of the mural paintings in South Africa House. "The paintings in South Africa House," she writes, "were understood by many at the time as accurate representations of passages in South Africa's history, to the extent that a number of publishers of school history texts requested copies of the images as illustrations of events for their books."

> commission for the Johannesburg station in 1932 (*q.v.*), and it is perhaps to this that Baker is referring here], were experimenting in the art of mural painting (Baker, 1944: 134).

For Te Water (1934: 170), on the other hand, they were an essential component in communicating the unique character of "the two dominant white races of South Africa, one upon the other, of the 'European' culture of the one upon the 'African' culture of the other, and the insidious and all-pervading influences of aboriginal Africa on both of them."[22] At the official unveiling of the murals on 31st May 1934, he was less equivocal:

> When the Englishman or the Frenchman or the German thinks of South Africa he appears to think only in terms of gold or natives or wild animals. … [C]hiefly he thinks of us as an outpost of semi-barbarism, as a people, some of whom might be white, and not so very white, but most of whom he is certain are black. So I decided to make this national occasion the opportunity of showing our English and Continental friends a close-up view of, at any rate, one side of our cultural life (Te Water, 1934: 263).

Te Water's posturing and Baker's misgivings notwithstanding, all the murals nonetheless resonate powerfully with the notions of 'romance and history' that informed their vision for the building, albeit in a far more literal way.

The first murals one encounters on entering the building are a series of landscapes by Gwelo Goodman.[23] These paintings line the walls of what was originally an ante-room between the *Voorhuis* – a mock Cape Dutch reception room (figure 18), complete with flag stoned floor, ersatz Delft tiles (designed by Baker), VOC memorabilia, and an outsize stinkwood armoire – which served originally as the travel bureau, to the public reading room (these areas are no longer publicly accessible). Although Goodman's pictures were originally intended to decorate the *Voorhuis* (Leighton, n.d.: 15), Baker was not going to allow the purity of his 'romantic' evocation of the old Cape to be sullied by images that "are excellent as pictures, but have not the qualities of design required for wall painting" (Baker, 1944: 134), and hence their location in a space where people would be unlikely to tarry long.

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[22] Echoing powerful contemporary attitudes that denied or suppressed any recognition of an artistic cultural tradition amongst black South Africans, Te Water (1934b: 70) goes on to suggest that "while the practised eye of the African ranges far beyond the vision of the normal European, he has, with a noted exception [the Bushman], little if any, sense of line or form. For to the Bantu the Euclidean definition of a straight line is as meaningless as to a child." He magnanimously acknowledges, however, that "the student of Bantu music has observed that it is as impossible for the Bantu to sing a false note as it is easy for the European; that among these African peoples harmony is a universal gift possessed by man, woman and child."

[23] Robert Gwelo Goodman (1871 – 1939). See Berman, Ogilvie.

In fact, had Baker been given any choice, he would most certainly not have allowed Goodman's work to be exhibited at all. However, the choice of Goodman had been made by South African government ministers (BaH 31/5: 6 June 1933), to be sponsored by the Finance Department, and Baker thus had no option but to accede to their wishes. He noted sulkily in his diary (BaH 31/5: 8 June 1933) that he had remarked to the High Commissioner "there was no room and we were in danger of flooding our building [with pictures]. Some of these gifts ought to be given to South African buildings", but wrote, somewhat more diplomatically, to Goodman (BaH 31/4: 15 September 1933), suggesting that he should select "an architectural subject", and rather immodestly suggesting that "it might be Groote Schuur [Rhodes' residence, which Baker had redesigned in 1896] seen from the Avenue, or alternatively the Groote Schuur garden with terraces." Clearly unconvinced by Goodman's ability to rise to the challenge of producing murals worthy of his vision of 'history and romance' he continued,

> You will, of course, know better than I how much difference there is between the technique of mural and easel painting, and how unsatisfactory an easel technique may be when it is permanently set in a wall. … I feel too, that in the architectural subjects we want fullness of design everywhere, and it is for this purpose that I would suggest figurative subjects.

Goodman was not impressed, replying immediately both to Baker and the High Commissioner. To Baker, in a furious scrawl on pages torn from a receipt book (BaH 31/5: 1 January 1934a), he wrote,

> may I make it quite clear I did not ask for this commission! (much as I like doing it). I gather that it was considered by many people including the Prime Minister that work of mine in South Africa House would be a valuable asset. My view is that unless it is completely Gwelo in character and design and technique it will have no value whatever! Artists must have their own way!!

Reiterating that the commission had come to him unbidden, he complained to the High Commissioner (BaH 31/5: 1 January 1934b):

> Baker asks why I should desire to do decorations for South Africa House? Why are there no places in South Africa to decorate? […] I am making a huge sacrifice in fees to do it. … Baker says I have not designed the decoration to fit the panels. I have designed work to fit rectangular spaces on canvas for the last 40 years. It would be a disaster if now I fail for the first time!

The firing of these salvoes – what Te Water's secretary described as the "the S[outh] African Theatre of War … [on] the Gwelo Goodman front" (BaH 31/5: 12 April 1935) – continued unabated until the paintings were eventually installed.

Baker remained unconvinced: "The landscapes", he wrote in his diary of the finished products, "are merely posters, and the flower panels coloured photographs" (BaH 31/5: 10 May 1934).

But to what exactly was Baker objecting? The paintings, presented in Goodman's characteristically staid Impressionist style, seem innocuous enough. Indeed, in the context of the travel bureau (figure 19) and within the taste of the time they seem to fulfil quite adequately the function of allowing visitors an intimation of the scenic splendour awaiting them in South Africa; the "supreme beauty of a Western Province landscape" (Te Water, 1934: 263). Moreover, the paintings' proximity to the *Voorhuis* also reinforces their iconographic engagement with idealised aspects of Cape architecture, landscape, produce, and flowers. Commenting on the painting of Groot Constantia the weekly periodical *South Africa*, the mouthpiece of the British expatriate community in South Africa, suggested that they would serve to remind "exiles of the friendly stoeps and the doors which for them ever stand open" (*South Africa*, 1934: 265). In Chapter 3, I show how evocations of the Cape in public art in the 1930s engaged the rhetoric of fusion politics by providing a powerful and obvious reference point for notions of European learning and civilisation in South Africa. The added advantage of such a reference was that it could engage both the liberal humanist (the so-called 'Cape Dutch liberals') as well as the 'authentic' Afrikaner constituencies, and it is clearly the same sentiments that are at play here. Furthermore, although empty of human occupants, the landscapes are redolent of the controlling gaze of the colonialist, the very mountains rendered truly visible only by the extent to which their forms are mirrored in the gracious symmetry of the gables on the homesteads, or by the grand vistas created by tree-lined farmlands (figure 20).

In effect, these sentiments are not out of keeping with Baker's notion of 'history and romance', but are somehow too oblique and diluted to satisfy his exalted expectations of the muralist's art. Their chief flaw, in his eyes, seemed to be the lack of a coherent figurative element through which – by implication – the imperialist gaze could be directed. As he had put it in his first letter to Goodman (BaH 31/5: 15 September 1933), "we want fullness of design everywhere, and it is for this purpose that I would suggest figurative subjects."

Pierneef's panels on the gallery above the exhibition hall – a virtual restatement, stylistically, iconographically, and ideologically of his Johannesburg station panels completed the previous year[24] (1932) – depict similarly ordered, vacant views of landscapes from the four provinces of the Union (figure 21). To a contemporary audience there could be no more appropriate and 'authentic' a depiction of the South African landscape than Pierneef's. In his address, broadcast live to South Africa, at the official unveiling of the murals on 31st May[25] 1934 Te Water – who was sufficiently enamoured of Pierneef's work to commission two additional paintings to decorate his official residence in London – described these panels as

> the work of the most typical and gifted of our landscape painters. … [Pierneef's] profound and sympathetic knowledge of the veld, of African nature, of native life, of Bushman painting, his love of all that is Africa, have all gone to the creation of a style of art which can only be described as African. The work he has done in South Africa House will prove, for the European critic, to be the key to our South African culture, possibly even to a greater degree than the beautiful work of his collaborators (Te Water, 1934a: 263).

South Africa (1934: 264) took this a step further. Expediently ignoring Pierneef's ardent and well known Afrikaner nationalist sympathies (Coetzee 1992) it suggested that anyone who displayed such obvious patriotism must also be a lover of unity:

> Pierneef refuses to localise. One feels that he loves land and folk from Cape to Zambesi. The essential Pierneef is in these seven pictures. Guileless and charming, with no rancour or envy, one who ever seeks to harmonise and tranquilise, however untoward the conditions, ardent friend of unity – that is Pierneef.

These paintings are ostensibly a celebration of South Africa's scenic splendours (figure 22), and were thus an appropriate visual adjunct to the exhibition hall. This space originally served to promote South Africa's multiple charms by means of cabinets and vitrines displaying a motley assortment of stuffed animals, South African wines and 'native curios' (figure 23). However, the images also resonate strongly with the tropes of freedom and adventure, underscored by the notion of the divinely appointed mission of the colonialist, that characterise the decorative

[24] See Coetzee (1992) for a critical analysis of the Station Panels, as well as detailed account of their commissioning circumstances.
[25] Since 1910 South Africa's 'National Day', later to be appropriated by the Nationalist government as 'Republic Day'.

programme as a whole. As Nico Coetzee puts it in his discussion of the station panels,

> The landscapes are an invitation, a reassurance and a promise: an invitation to take ownership because landscape is empty and therefore does not belong to anyone; reassuring because its aestheticizing distance means that it is frozen in time – eternally present as an Utopian ideal; a promise because, in its unexplored condition, it is the expectation of riches and potential – the sign of divine election (Coetzee 1992: 25).[26]

Coetzee locates the station panels ideologically in the charged nationalistic rubric of the early 1930s, in which questions of Afrikaner identity as well as of the 'poor white problem' were very much bound up with issues concerning access to, and ownership of land. In these terms, he argues that these celebrated panels played an important role in reinforcing Afrikaner nationalist constructs of identity; "a pictorial evocation of what they wanted to believe of the land and of themselves" (Coetzee, 1992: 25).

Pierneef's ostensible "ardent friend[ship] of unity" notwithstanding, it might be precisely this implicit privileging of the nationalist over the imperialist gaze in Pierneef's South Africa House panels that led Baker to comment in a letter to Te Water (BaH 31: 15 November 1933):

> I think the effect on me of Piernief's [*sic*] pictures is best expressed by this quotation from Ruskin, which always seems to me so apt for the civilised beauty of the western province valleys in contrast to their mountain background: 'No scene is continually and untiringly loved, but one rich in joyful human labour; smooth in field; fair in garden; full in orchard; trim, sweet, and frequent in homestead, ringing with voices of vivid existence'.

He complains further that the artist

> seems to have made rather too much of the mountain background and not enough of the more peaceful beauty of the valleys; in other words, the effect of his pictures may be to attract the adventurer and lover of wild scenery but not those who like the beauty of the peaceful cultivated valleys; in Kipling's words 'the blue goodness of the Weald'.

The reference to another arch-imperialist is telling. Romance and adventure are all very well, Baker seems to be implying, as long as they are in the service of King and Empire. This might also explain his tight-lipped comment in his

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[26] As I show in Chapter 1, he goes on to argue that Pierneef's landscapes are quintessentially expressive of the 'civil religion' of the Afrikaner, simultaneously creating and reinforcing an imagined identification with the land, and the inalienable right – divinely ordained and paid for by the mythic suffering of the Voortrekkers – to ownership and the subsequent imposition of order and control. He suggests that the static, formulaic, and dehumanised character of Pierneef's landscapes in effect mirrors this notion of the imposition of order and control on the landscape, and the same might well be said for the impossibly neat landscape presented here.

autobiography (1944: 134) that "the landscapes of Piernief [*sic*] are admirable in representative design, though wanting for murals in strength of tone and colour."

For the walls of the gallery above the exhibition hall Jan Juta[27] was commissioned to produce a series of "'historic' panels of the Dutch period" (Te Water, 1934: 263). Juta had distinguished family connections: he was a scion of the Juta publishing dynasty, and his father, Sir Henry, had been Judge President of the Supreme Court (1922 – 27) and Speaker in the House of Assembly. He had also had an international art training in the late teens and early 1920s, during which he had been on the fringes of Gertrude Stein's American circle in Paris. Friendly with D. H. Lawrence, he had travelled extensively with the author (whose portrait, now in the National Portrait Gallery in London, he painted in 1920), and had illustrated the first edition of his *Sea and Sardinia* in 1923 (London: Martin Secker). This exposure to the cultural *demimonde* of first decades of the twentieth century not only assured Juta a certain cachet as a 'modernist', but had also given the painter access to a wealthy and influential clientele – predominantly smart New Yorkers or expatriate Americans in France – for whom he had completed a number of mural decorations, mostly in engraved glass.

On the strength of this illustrious *curriculum vitae* he proposed himself to Baker in 1932, citing as his *bona fides* his family connections and informing him that

> I am a mural painter, having studied fresco and mural painting in all its branches in Italy and Spain, and worked both here in New York and in Paris. Naturally, as a South African, I am interested in South Africa House, and the ideas to be therein incorporated. Do you think that there is a chance of any mural decoration being doing in it – perhaps one wall or a stairway of descriptive painting? If so, have I, as the only South African mural painter (that I know of) any chance of being employed? (BaH 31/5: 28 March 1932).

Te Water had in fact alerted Baker to Juta's work much earlier, and Baker had commented then that

> Juta's work is interesting; he seems to have talent and invention, but we should, I think, know more about his work before recommending him for any mural decoration which we may hope to have in South Africa House.

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[27] Jan Carl Juta, (b. Cape Town 1895, d. Mendham, USA, 1990). Juta studied in Cape Town, at Christchurch College in Oxford, at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, at the Belles Artes in Madrid, and at the British School in Rome. He served with the British Ministry of Information in London and New York from 1940 to 1946, and was the chief of the Visual Information Department at the United Nations from 1947 to 1957 (AAD/1993/9).

> His development towards a modern style and his experiments in metallic paint are no doubt extremely interesting, but South Africa should I think exercise caution before it makes any wide departure from traditional methods … we must again be cautious about turning a young painter loose to experiment and gain his own experience on our 'corpore vili' (BaH 31/4: 6 August 1930).

His response to Juta was similarly guarded:

> As you can imagine, we are being inundated with requests to paint the building, but we think it is necessary to use great caution because mural painting is a distinct art which has not been highly developed yet in South Africa. You perhaps may be one of the few exceptions. … I assure you that I take a very great personal interest in the scheme of a well thought out series of mural paintings in the building (BaH 31/5: 8 April 1932).

However, after Juta visited him with illustrations of his work Baker thawed somewhat. Here was a young artist who clearly understood figurative painting in the service of 'history and romance'. As he put it Te Water:

> I am glad to be able to tell you that I was favourably impressed with what [Juta] showed me as far as one can judge without the colour and texture of the actual paintings. He has, I think, both decorative and historical sense which is what we want in my opinion for permanent mural painting (BaH 31/5: 4 November 1932).

Furthermore, Juta had already done some groundwork in terms of establishing stylistic and historical prototypes, which could easily translate into the cultural stereotypes so pleasing to Baker:

> I picked out two photographs which I liked best, one a scene in an old colonial house in America with the people in their costume in the foreground. This seems to us what we want to depict of the life in the old colonial houses in South Africa. Another one is of a series of adventures of Marco Polo which would be the type of a series I think we might have depicting the early sea history of South Africa (the crusading adventurous navigators).

Baker's approval coupled with Juta's impeccable political connections was an irresistible combination, and the artist was promptly appointed at a minimum fee of £1,300 plus travelling and studio expenses (AAD/1993/9: 1 August 1933) on the condition, at Te Water's insistence, that he should work in association with Pierneef (BaH 31/5: 14 March 1933). Juta, ignorant of, or perhaps wilfully oblivious to, Pierneef's reputation as a muralist, wrote to Baker that "I gather [Pierneef] has had little or no experience of mural work so I am sure he will agree to anything we may decide to as to methods, *etc*." (BaH 31/5: 2 June 1933). Juta's smug self-assurance regarding his own skill was not necessarily shared by

all. Reporting to Baker on the progress of the murals, Alexander Scott,[28] Baker's project manager and *aide-de-camp* at South Africa House, recorded in his diary that he thought "Pierneuf's [*sic*] pictures had a decorative quality, but Juta's were hard and not at all in scale with Pierneuf's [*sic*] set" (BaH 31/5: 19 April 1934).

Nevertheless, Juta's six panels – two dealing with the Van der Stels' governorship of the Cape, one with the Great Trek, one with the 1820 Settlers, and two with the 'natives' – neatly condense all the conflicting and contradictory elements that constitute Te Water's 'strenuous history' of the 'two dominant white races', offset against 'insidious and all-pervading influences of aboriginal Africa'. The first painting in the series is identified by the gilded inscription below it as 'Simon van der Stel at the Castle, Cape Town, 22nd December, 1681' (figure 24), followed by the similarly inscribed text,

> *'Namacquas hebbende aan ons vertoont 2 a 3 stuckjes cooper door haer selffs uyt 't geberghte in haer landt gehaelt waeruyt ons toeschijnt dat 't gemelte metael aldaer in grootte abondantie moet wesen*, Despatch to the "Seventeen" 23rd April 1682.' ('Namaquas showed us two or three pieces of copper that they had themselves taken from the mountains in their lands, and from which we could surmise that there must be an abundance of metal there' – my translation.)

The narrative refers to a recorded incident from Simon van der Stel's governorship of the Cape where Namaquas brought specimens of copper to barter for goods, and thus, by the uneasy logic of imperialism, comes to represent in this context "the mineral wealth of the country" (South Africa House n.d.: 20).

Originally, Juta had painted a panel entitled the *The Arrival of Governor van Riebeeck in Table Bay, 1652* – an event that *Fortune* (1935: 78) suggested was "like Plymouth Rock's Landing to an American eye" – and which depicted Van Riebeeck before a large cross with his followers kneeling before it (figure 25). This painting was, however, removed shortly after its unveiling. Te Water (1934a: 263) had enthusiastically praised its ostensible virtues – not least, the quotation on which it was based:

> … that curious mixture of commercialism and Christianity … 'That the interests of the East India Company may be promoted, justice maintained, and the true Reformed Christian Doctrine implanted and propagated among the wild and savage inhabitants of this land.'

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[28] Alexander Thomson Scott FRIBA (1887 – 1962), best remembered for the work that he did on government office buildings in New Delhi, India 1946 – 47.

Nonetheless, Afrikaners at home, through such mouthpieces as the FAK (Federation for Afrikaans Cultural Societies), the Helpmekaar Vereniging (Society for Mutual Aid) (see Chapter 4) and the South African Academy expressed the criticism that the 'women in nun's habit' and the 'Roman Cross' depicted in the painting were a misrepresentation of 'our Protestant forefathers.' "The whole impression that the pieces gives one is Spanish-Catholic," *Die Huisgenoot* (22 June 1934: 13) quoted one Professor J. A. Wiid of Stellenbosch University as saying:

> The women look more like nuns than they do like Protestant Dutch women. Furthermore, there would in any case not have been any women present at the landing … It is precisely at this time that the Dutch were at their most Protestant-minded. How on earth could they then have arrived here with a cross?[29] (my translation).

The report goes on to express outrage at the response of the Secretary of Public Works, J. S. Clelland, when he was confronted with these complaints. "He [Clelland] was entirely satisfied," continues the article, "so satisfied in fact that his department is planning to invite Juta to do some work in South Africa" (this is clearly a reference to the Pretoria City Hall panels, which, as I discuss in the next Chapter, Juta completed shortly after the South Africa House commission).

> Regarding the presence of the cross in the painting, he expressed doubt as to its historical inappropriateness, and added, naïvely as a child, '… crosses are often used, even on graves. And Juta's version of the cross at the landing place does not necessarily mean that Van Riebeeck erected it. It was possibly the work of Portuguese seafarers that were there before him[30] (my translation).

"It is indeed wonderful," the author noted sarcastically, "how the bioscope can influence some people's point of view!" (my translation).[31]

The author of this article was in fact responding to a deeper malaise, keenly felt amongst Afrikaners, that the decorative programme of South Africa House was all but ignoring the Afrikaner experience. "We are not taking issue here with the artistic merits or otherwise of Juta's work," the article continued, "but with the

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[29] *Die vroue lyk meer op nonne as op Protestantse Hollandervroue. Buitendien sou daar tog by die landing geen vroue aanwesig gewees het nie … Dis dan juis op hierdie tydstip dat die Hollanders die ergste Protestantsgesind was. Hoe op aarde kon hulled dan met 'n kruis hier aangekom het?*

[30] *Hy was heeltemaal tevrede: só tevrede selfs dat sy departement van plan is om Juta uit te nooi om ook werk in Suid-Afrika te doen. Omtrent die aanwesigheid van die kruis op die skildery het hy twyfel uitgespreek of dit histories onjuis is en daar toe kinderlik-naïef aan toegevoeg: … Kruise word dikwels gebruik, selfs op grafte. En Juta se weergawe van die kruis op die landingsplek beteken nie noodwendig dat Van Riebeeck dit opgerig het nie. Moontlik was dit die werk van Portugese seevaarders wat voor hom daar was.*

[31] *Dis darem wonderlik hoe die bioskoop sommige mense se uitsig kan beïnvloed!* (my translation).

unjust version of an event that is of the utmost importance to Afrikaners"[32] (my translation). For the Afrikaner constituency this insensitivity was particularly worrying, chiefly in terms of the way in which it would influence the representation of the Voortrekkers (on which panel Juta had not yet commenced working). As the author puts it,

> the Voortrekkers have been so often presented as wild ruffians with long beards and the ever-present long whip that we cannot tolerate such a thing in a place which is meant to present to the outside world a faithful version of our national identity [*landseie*], both past and present[33] (my translation).

Warming to his theme, the author cites the impressions of a "young Afrikaner academic" (*jong Afrikaner-geleerde*), who had complained in *Die Volkstem* of the preponderance of references to the Portuguese in the decorative programme, and of the "violence that this unfairness does to one's historical perspective" (*'n onewewigtigheid wat 'n mens se historiese perspektief geweld aandoen*). While the High Commissioner deserved praise for his efforts at bringing the work of South African artists to the attention of the international community, he nonetheless – especially as far as the Dias/Van Riebeeck debate was concerned – had betrayed his people:

> We are of the opinion that [Te Water] allowed himself too much to be swayed by men that do not have a thorough understanding of the history and traditions of the Dutch-speaking section of our population. And the replacement of the Van Riebeeck statue with one of Dias was surely an injustice to the memory of the founder of a white South Africa, something that Mr. Te Water, a born Afrikaner, should have realised and should not have allowed, no matter who pleaded for it[34] (my translation).

Faced with such intense opposition, Te Water had no option but to choose the path of least resistance. He thus arranged for the painting to be presented to the South African National Gallery in Cape Town (see Appendix 2) and prevailed on Juta to provide rather a 'Simon van der Stel' panel as a companion piece to the next narrative panel, which shows Simon van der Stel's son *Willem Adriaan van der Stel on his farm Vergelegen* (figure 26). As we shall see Juta nonetheless still

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[32] *Ons het dit hier nie oor die kunswaarde of andersins van Juta se werk nie, maar oor die onjuiste weergawe van 'n gebeurtenis wat vir die Afrikaners van die allergrootste belang is.*

[33] *Die Voortrekkers is al dikwels genoeg voorgestel as wilde woestaards met lang baarde en die alewige lang sweep dat ons nie so iets kan duld in 'n plek wat bedoel is om aan die buitewêreld 'n getroue weergawe van ons landseie, sowel hede as verlede, te gee nie.*

[34] *Maar ons meen tog dat hy hom te veel laat lei het deur manne wat geen genoegsame begrip het van die geskiedenis en tradisies van die Hollandssprekende deel van ons volk nie. En die vervanging van die Van Riebeeckstandbeeld deur een van Dias was beslis 'n onreg teenoor die nagedagtenis van die stigter van 'n blanke Suid-Afrika, iets wat mnr. Te Water as gebore Afrikaner moes besef en nie toegelaat het nie, al het wie ook al daarvoor gepleit.*

had a chance to engage the subject of Van Riebeeck's landing in three panels outside the High Commissioner's office, but painted in such a way that they studiously avoided any religious references.

The *Vergelegen* panel is subscribed with the text

> '*Dat het jegenwoordigh te veld liggende coorn, druyff en verdere gewasschen na den tijd van het jaar haer (Godt loof) redelijk wel verthoonen en ons gevolgelijck een goeden oogst schijnen te beloven*, Despatch to the "Seventeen", 28th October 1702.' ('The corn, grapes and other plants sown in the fields is (praise God) looking reasonably good for the time of year, and we consequently believe we can promise a good harvest' – my translation.)

Willem Adriaan van der Stel, who succeeded his father as Governor of the Cape from 1699 to 1707, was a ruthlessly successful farmer who amassed considerable personal wealth, often at the expense of fellow burghers (Giliomee, 2003: 23ff). By the 1930s the elisions of Afrikaner nationalist history had constructed him as the individual who had done the most to establish "the foundations of South Africa's agricultural industry" (South Africa House, n.d.: 20), and it is clearly this construct that Juta engages in this panel.

In May 1935, *Fortune* magazine, as part of an extended editorial on the South African diamond mining industry, published a lengthy description of the paintings with full colour reproductions (an expensive undertaking in 1935). Interestingly, the tone of the commentary on the panels is somewhat at odds with the 'unity in diversity' hype that characterises most of the other contemporary accounts in the Anglophone press, taking a decidedly pro-Dutch (that is, Afrikaner) bias. "Britain's monument to Britain's diamond empire", begins the article,

> is South Africa House… . Opened in June, 1933, it is an ornate prayer of thanksgiving for the stone, the wood, the metal, the flowers, the beasts, and the crops (such as they are) that England's emissaries have taken out of that grandiose continent (*Fortune*, 1935: 75).

Keen to establish its sympathies with 'the Dutch', and equally keen to claim Jan Juta as an authentic 'Dutch' voice, it continues:

> To understand [Juta's panels] fully, you must know first that South Africa (though part of Britain's' empire) is in spirit a Dutch colony, founded by the Dutch, tilled and peopled and fought for by the Dutch, fertile in the language and traditions of its Dutch settlers, the Boers. Though not indigenous to its soil, they are to South Africa what the red Indians are to North America, with this difference: that the Boers (being Dutch, and consequently able and thrifty) have thrived, grown rich and numerous under English rule. So Jan Juta must be though of as a Boer artist, painting the history of his own people (*Fortune*, 1935: 75).

Fortune was not alone in promoting Juta's ostensible Dutch lineage and its significance for South Africa House. "It was a happy choice which decreed that Mr. Jan Juta should undertake five panels which epitomise three centuries of tumultuous history" wrote *South Africa* (1934: 264) in its report on the official unveiling of the paintings, "for he grew up amid the scenes and traditions which he now portrays with a fine historic sense." Both these writers conveniently overlook the fact that Juta's links to South Africa were, by the 1930s, increasingly tenuous. In fact, he had spent most of his adult life in Europe and the United States, and he would continue to do so until his death. Such claims to a South African identity as he did make both in his autobiographical short stories *Looking out for the Ostriches: Tales of South Africa* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949) and novella *Background in Sunshine* (New York: Scribners, 1972) were highly romanticised and clearly aimed at an international audience keen to have its notions of African exoticism confirmed. In effect, both these periodicals were clearly responding to a deeper perception, unexpressed outside of the Afrikaans popular press, that, despite platitudes about the 'fuller union of the two races' Baker's imperialist sympathies had gained the upper hand in the decorative programme of South Africa House. At some level, this needed to be tempered with a fuller acknowledgement of the ostensible 'Dutch' constituency, and this is what *Fortune* – as an American journal perhaps out of a shared sense of anti-monarchism – aimed to address.

The two Van der Stel panels emphasise the acquisition of wealth through mining and agriculture, with emphasis on the extent to which this was seen as the natural prerogative of the colonists: it is they, after all, who tamed and civilised the impossibly ordered landscapes in which they are depicted, and to them that the locals give their bounty. The master/servant dynamics are also clearly spelled out: in the *Namaqua* panel, as much by a kind of hierarchical perspective that makes the indigenes appear smaller than their colonial masters, as by their scant traditional garb, and in the *Vergelegen* panel by the way in which the black workers are depicted; an anonymous mass of barefoot, bare-chested men, and women balancing baskets on their heads. In both panels, the Dutch burghers are individualised by being elaborately costumed and coiffed. *Fortune* (1935: 76) did not miss the chance to reflect on one of the primary sources of the Boer/Brit divide: "He [Willem Adriaan van der Stel] was the third

Governor of the Dutch colony. Ninety-three years later, in command of his fertile new lands were those insatiable colonizers [*sic*], the British."

The two smaller panels that separate the narratives, further reinforce the implicit tropes of 'savagery' and 'civilisation' that inform these works. The first, inscribed '1652', shows three stylised Zulu warriors, their assegais drawn and their shields presented, and depicts "native life … as found by the Dutch settlers" (South Africa House, n.d.: 20); that is, threatening, alien, and savage. The next one, inscribed '1700' shows three equally stylised black women, swathed somewhat incongruously in sarongs (but not so as to entirely conceal the naked breast of the central figure) balancing pots on their heads (figure 27). These represent "native life … as developed under Christian and governmental teaching" (South Africa House, n.d.: 20) – that is, tamed, subjugated and domesticated, with just enough of the 'noble savage' about them to prevent them being entirely assimilated into European culture. As *Fortune* (1935: 75) put it in describing these panels,

> [Here Juta] glimpses the natives who were in Africa even before the Dutch. In 1652: the men stand on the beach with spears lifted, in an attitude of suspicion as the Dutch come ashore. In 1700: the women, domesticated by fifty years of virtuous Boer rule, are statuesque, proud, and placid in their strength.

This objectification of 'native life' in terms of its 'rightful place' in relation to the Dutch burghers resonates in turn with the Native Policy of the fusion government. The paternalistic character of this policy is clear, and summed up, as it is, by the following statement: "the recognition of the Natives as a permanent portion of the population of South Africa under the Christian trusteeship of the European race is accepted as a fundamental principle" (*cit*. Le May 1995: 171) – in effect, marginalised and silenced. How ironic, then, that we now know that Simon van der Stel, had he lived in the mid-twentieth century, would probably not have passed the apartheid government's stringent racial classification criteria for 'whiteness': his Batavian-born mother, Maria Lievens, was the daughter of a Dutch sea captain and an indigenous woman from the East (Giliomee, 2003: 15).

Positioned further along the wall, on either side of a staircase leading to the exhibition hall below, are two more murals by Juta, this time on the theme of the 'Great Trek' and the '1820 Settlers' (figures 28 and 29). Amplifying its theme of the unfairly vanquished Dutch, *Fortune* (1935: 78) devoted a lengthy paragraph

to the *Great Trek* panel, describing it as a depiction of the Boers' heroic attempt to "escape the English who had usurped their colonies in the South." Avoiding any hint of ambiguity, it continued:

> Herein Jan Juta paints the very source of the bitterness of his race and their desperate determination not to be subjects of an alien king. But the Boers were tormented by a tragic destiny … defeated [after the South African War], the Boers had nowhere else to go. And so, patiently, they submit at last to Britain's benevolent rule.

The *1820* panel, on the other hand, occasioned only the terse comment that the ungrateful British immigrants, "aided by Dutch farmers … trekked inland to settle on the arid veld as best they could. Eighty-two more years, and all of South Africa was theirs."

These paintings are surprisingly similar in terms of general subject, style and meaning to two panels that Juta completed for the Pretoria City Hall in 1938, and which I discuss fully in Chapter 3. As with the Pretoria City Hall panels, the pairing of these two paintings celebrates the intrepid, pioneering spirit of the 'two races' of South Africa, in which both constituencies are recognised as having a legitimate claim to the land: for the Afrikaners through the mythic suffering and hardships endured by the Voortrekkers, and for the English through the efficient way in which they braved the vicissitudes of frontier life and organised the colonisation of the Eastern Cape.

In this way, these panels speak very directly to the programme of principles of the fusion government published in 1934, namely:

> The development of a predominant sense of South African national unity, based on the equality of the Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking sections of the community, coupled with the recognition and appreciation by either section of the distinctive cultural inheritance of the other (*cit*. Le May, 1996: 171).

They thus resonate with other aspects of the decorative programme; not least, Baker's twin domes. The themes of a common destiny are reinforced once again by what was to become Juta's pet device of placing a prolix and somewhat sanctimonious quotation under the paintings.[35] The 'Voortrekker' quotes Piet Retief on the eve of the Great Trek as saying:

> "*Wy hebben besloten, dat alwaar wy ook gaan mogen, wy de regtvaardige grondregelen van vryheid zullen ophouden"* (Piet Retief, dated 22nd January

[35] Anne E. Coombes suggests that the tensions between South African nationalism and British imperialism are in some ways played out in these captions, in so far as they serve to "eliminate any hint of ambiguity in their significance for the nascent South African state" (Coombes, 2003: 288).

> 1837) ('We decided that wherever we may go, we will uphold the principles of fairness and freedom' – my translation.)

The '1820' panel has Lord Charles Somerset informing us that the aim of encouraging British settlers to the Eastern Cape is "[t]o organise colonisation, which by spreading over a fine and fertile country shall be strong enough to support itself" (Despatch by Lord Charles Somerset to Lord Bathurst 22nd May, 1819).

As with the Pretoria City Hall panels, as we shall see in Chapter 3, race and gender roles are clearly defined and circumscribed: while white men resolutely get on with the business of pioneering, their demurely attired women stand by them or nurse their children; black men obligingly supply hard labour while black women occupy the margins of the scenes. Also as with the Pretoria City Hall paintings, the presence of black women in the scenes seem to serve no purpose other than providing stereotyped representations of 'the native' as the exotic other. In both panels, however, the depiction of black women is in relation to implicit notions of motherhood. In the '1820' panel the urn that the figure of the black woman, standing behind a white woman cradling a baby, balances on her head may be read in terms of the symbolic associations of the urn with fecundity and/or virginity (figure 27). In effect, it also becomes a kind of metonymic displacement of the pendulous breasts of the black woman carrying a child on her back on the extreme right hand side of the 'Voortrekker' panel. As with the Pretoria City Hall paintings, these references to black motherhood seem to imply a recognition of the ongoing reality of 'the native races', but effectively renders them both marginal and contained.[36]

In style and intention, these paintings are very similar to three further panels by Juta, occupying pride of place with three panels by J. H. Amshewitz,[37] on the wall outside the High Commissioner's office (figure 30). These three panels depict the landing of Jan van Riebeeck (figures 31 and 32), and in so doing they amplify the theme of the impact of Dutch colonisation of the Cape, while mollifying the querulous Afrikaner nationalist faction that, as we have seen, had objected to Dias being given pride of place over Van Riebeeck on the façade. True

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[36] This may also refer to the fact that black female slaves and servants often acted as wet nurses to the colonists' children.

[37] John Henry Amshewitz R.B.A., b. Ramsgate, England 1907, d. Muizenberg, South Africa 1942. Although his surname was officially registered as Amschewitz, he preferred the anglicised version and took that as his professional name. See Esmé Berman (1983), and the biography and catalogue raisonné by his wife Sarah Briana Amshewitz (1951).

to Juta's pedantic (if somewhat idealised) interest in historical sources, these are based on accounts of Van Riebeeck's landing at the Cape as recorded in his *Dagverhaal*, or ship's log (South Africa House n.d.: 14). *South Africa* (1934: 264) went so far to say, "Mr. Juta's likeness of Van Riebeeck is based on authentic portraits," where in fact no reliable portrait existed. As Jillian Carman (1994: 94) shows, the ostensible image of Van Riebeeck, which, until the 1990s was included on South African banknotes, is in fact a likeness of a lesser Dutch East India Company official, Bartholomeus Vermuyden.

The ostensible historical accuracy of the scenes, however, is subordinated to the overriding ideological agenda that promotes the notion of the civilised European taking possession of virgin territory. The presence of indigenous inhabitants is acknowledged by the depiction of two figures in the middle distance, clad only in skins and seemingly engaged in bartering a cow with one of the Dutchmen, but they are effectively conflated with the landscape – as omnipresent and unavoidable as the beach and the distant mountains, and ultimately as possessable.

A similar sentiment informs the plaster copy of John Tweed's relief sculpture of Van Riebeeck's landing (figure 33) – the bronze original of which is on the gable above the entrance of Rhodes' Cape Town mansion Groote Schuur – which is placed in a small waiting space adjacent to the High Commissioner's office. It depicts an elaborately costumed van Riebeeck, flanked by a retinue of sailors and officials, extending the hand of friendship to a scantily clad and somewhat cowed looking Khoisan family. As Te Water put it to Hertzog during the negotiations around the Dias statue on the façade, the central placement of this panel was a way of "symbolising, in that positions [Van Riebeeck's] stepping, so to speak, into the centre of the historical South African picture" (BaH 31/3: 16 November 1931). The literal and metaphorical gulf separating the two groups, and across which Van Riebeeck extends a proprietorial hand, nonetheless speaks volumes about abject misunderstandings, failed communications and broken promises.

The three Amshewitz panels, on the left hand side of the door to the High Commissioner's office, return to the theme – introduced on the façade by Steynberg's sculpture of Dias, and reiterated throughout the building by Baker's escutcheons and emblems – of the intrepid and divinely inspired Portuguese explorers who were "directly responsible for the discovery of South Africa, and

who established the first contact there with western civilisation" (South Africa House, n.d.: 13). Since the paintings were being generously sponsored by the politically well-connected Johannesburg business mogul Michael Haskel[38] and since Haskel, an ardent Zionist, had chosen the Jewish Amshewitz, Baker – against what he considered his better judgement – had no choice but to acquiesce. When Amshewitz was first mooted, Baker noted in his diary:

> I do not think from what I saw that his own skill justified Amschewitz's criticisms in his report on the Bank of England [Amshewitz had been commissioned to paint murals for the Bank of England]. His drawing did not show the qualities necessary for great decoration (BaH 31/5: 5 May 1933).

Baker was particularly troubled by what he termed "the vulgar exuberance" (BaH 31/5: 9 June 1933) of Amshewitz's style, and while they were being painted criticised Amshewitz repeatedly for what he described as a lack of 'restraint'. "I have got this reproduction of Lawrence's 'Queen Elizabeth and Raleigh' at St Stephen's Hall from the Medici Society," he wrote to Te Water (BaH 31/5: 7 July 1933), "will you either get Amschewitz to come and see it or suggest that he gets a copy? It has the dignity and simplicity of expression which we should I think aim at." Keen to enlist support for his point of view he noted in his diary on the progression of the paintings that

> I told [Te Water] of my conversation with General Smuts, particularly that I was nervous of Amschewitz'[s] exhuberance [*sic*]. I thought Smuts was most nervous about it and would prefer no paintings in the great hall. Te Water said he was also nervous of Amschewitz and would go and see him and then report to me again.

As the paintings neared completion he wrote in confidence to Te Water,

> [the paintings] have the same grave defect of the want of that restraint in line, form and colour which is required in mural painting. [Amshewitz] never has a pure colour and his colours leave me with the unpleasant taste of a second rate Victorian drawing-room (BaH 31/5: 1 December 1933).

Te Water, however, had clearly had enough of Baker's incessant complaining. Shortly after this Baker noted in his diary that, "[Te Water] agreed with my criticisms but thought it would not do to go much further in criticising artists" (BaH 31/5: 6 December 1933).

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[38] Michael Haskel (b. Vilnius, Lithuania 1880, d. Johannesburg 1942) immigrated to South Africa in 1907 and amassed considerable wealth from interests in farming, gold, and asbestos mining. An ardent Zionist, he was appointed Honorary Commissioner for the Union of South Africa in Palestine from 1933 – 1938. He was a generous social benefactor, and commissioned a number of public artworks from Amshewitz, including (in addition to those discussed in this thesis) a panel, also on the subject of the Portuguese 'voyages of discovery' for the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand (1934).

As we have seen in relation to the matter of the Dias sculpture on the façade of the building, the subject of the Portuguese 'voyages of discovery' was close to Baker's imperialist heart. As he put it in his letter entreating Hertzog to change his mind about putting Van Riebeeck in the niche:

> The achievement of the discovery of the Cape was as great an event in history as Columbus' discovery of America; an achievement even more successful, one may say, as Diaz was right in finding the coveted sea-way to the east, whereas Columbus was wrong, though in his error he discovered the New World (BaH 31/5: 12 November 1931).

In another letter to one of his associates (BaH 30/7: 16 March 1934), he wrote that

> [Prince] Henry [the Navigator] is one of my heros [*sic*] and I bring him in wherever I can in symbolising early South Africa or eastern history. He dreamed on his promontory as Cecil Rhodes dreamed on the Cape Peninsular [*sic*].

This must serve at least partly to explain his objection to Amshewitz's work. Notwithstanding his own highly developed sense of 'sentiment,' the overwrought theatricality that is their most salient characteristic was clearly out of keeping with the *gravitas* that Baker felt the depiction of these events warranted.

The popular press felt otherwise. "Mr. Amshewitz," wrote *South Africa* (1934: 264), "has brought to his task that fine sense of drama that never fails, and he has revelled in his magnificent themes." The artist also felt otherwise. Undaunted by Baker's unremitting criticism, he decided to submit them for consideration to the Royal Academy. Te Water was guardedly supportive of this decision, on the one hand recognising, as he put it in a confidential letter to Baker, that "the imprimatur of the Academy on Amshewitz's panels would help to stifle any criticism which might come from awkward quarters in the future" (BaH 31/5: 1 March 1934). On the other hand, he was unwilling to "court the danger of having them turned down." Baker obligingly offered the services of one Campbell Taylor, a respected Academician, to vet the paintings' chances. Predictably, the latter did not arrive at a favourable response. In support of his point of view he wrote, "I can see no distinction in the work, nor any decorative qualities. They appear to me to be like enlarged magazine illustrations, coloured, and not in the best of taste" (BaH 31/5: 19 March 1934). In the end the Academy rejected them, informing Amshewitz that, notwithstanding the President's opinion that they "were just the type of art the R[oyal] A[cademy] ought to encourage", the paintings could nonetheless not be hung "because of their size"

(Amshewitz, 1951: 23). Amshewitz bore the snub with equanimity and characteristic humour: "If I could be assured of a couple of commissions a year," he wrote to an associate,

> like the one I am finishing now [two further panels commissioned by Michael Haskel, one for the library at the University of the Witwatersrand and the other for the Pretoria City Hall, *q.v.*], I would not worry at all about sending it to the R.A. If they won't have the Amsheviks and prefer the Bolsheviks they can get on with it (Amshewitz, 1951: 24).

The panel on the left (figure 34) depicts Prince Henry the Navigator, "visualising his hopes of the establishment throughout the then undiscovered world, of the Red Cross of Portugal" (South Africa House, n.d.: 13). The centre panel (figure 35) shows the realisation of this vision in the form of the King and Queen of Portugal bidding farewell to "Bartholomeu Dias, a weather-beaten mariner, on the point of departure from Lisbon" (South Africa House, n.d.: 13). (On first seeing these paintings Baker had noted with dismay that, "The figure of the Queen is unpleasantly over painted (this really bad) and that of John of Portugal (these less important and not so bad), who was a fine figure, stands in the background with the face almost of a black man" (BaH 31/5: 1st December 1933)). The third painting shows Vasco da Gama entering Table Bay (figure 36). In all three images, the notion of the explorers' divinely sanctioned ideals is constantly reinforced; in the 'Prince Henry' and 'Vasco da Gama' panels by the presence in both of a monk crouched at their feet and in the 'Bartholomeu Dias' panel by the cross to which he points, as well as the standing figure of a praying monk behind the Queen.

The pairing of these paintings with those by Juta reinforces, at the iconographic level, the coming of divinely sanctioned 'civilisation' to the benighted African subcontinent, hence their prominent location outside the High Commissioner's office, the *sanctum sanctorum* of colonial administration in the metropole. Implicitly it is also a reminder of the non-British origins of South African colonialism, and thus daringly asserts an incipient South Africanism, independent of the British Empire. Stylistically, however, this pairing is not the happiest of choices. Where the Amshewitzes, true to the tradition of late Victorian narrative painting in which he was trained, are theatrical, overwrought and sentimental, the Jutas are laboured, self-consciously naïve and decorative; an attempt, perhaps, at imitating the stylised figurative painting, then popular, particularly by muralists in the United States under the Federal Arts

Programme of Roosevelt's New Deal. Instead of the intended effect of grandeur and high drama in the tradition of academic history painting, the proximity of the panels serves only to reinforce the involuntarily kitsch elements of the other.

Baker was not impressed. Although he had cautioned against commissioning artists who "lacked the needful training" that he felt mural painters required, "the South African government gave way to the importunities of their artists" (Baker, 1944: 134), and, as we have seen, was generally unadmiring of the murals. Of these paintings he commented, "[the panels] by Amshewitz fail in technique and Juta's in drawing" (Baker, 1944: 134). In a letter to Te Water, he complained that he found "[the Amshewitzes] very florid and Branwynesque, and heavily overloaded with sentiment" (BaH 31/5: 8 June 1933) – a classic case, one might argue with the advantage of hindsight, of the pot calling the kettle black.

2.5 'Before the coming of the white civilisation': the Zulu Room

It is clear, then, that Baker's objections to the murals were based as much on personal animosity towards some of the artists (particularly Goodman and Amshewitz) as on his intransigent, old-fashioned views on the "design and methods of mural painting in relation to architecture" (Baker, 1944: 172). In India his "advice as to the training and selection of artists was not taken, and painters with no thorough training in the difficult technique were for political reasons turned loose and uncontrolled upon my walls, and the architect was ignored" (Baker, 1944: 172) and he was determined that the same should not happen in South Africa House. As we have seen, however, he had limited success in controlling either the choice of artists or the work they produced. The exception was the decoration of a lobby on the fourth floor (figure 37) – originally open to the public – adjoining a suite of rooms reserved for the use of ministers and visiting government officials (South Africa House, n.d.: 19).

Following a precedent established at India House, Baker insisted that South African art students should be awarded the task of decorating this space with 'proper' murals, *i.e.* in the true fresco technique of egg tempera painted into plaster. To this end, "two most promising South African students … Mr Le Roux Smith, of the Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town, and Miss [Eleanor Esmonde-] White, a student of the Durban School of Fine Art" (*Cape Times*, 10 June 1933, *cit.* Barson 2000: 9) were granted a two-year scholarship by the South African government. Leaving nothing to chance, Baker arranged for the pair to

attend the Royal College of Art to be trained there by experts in mural painting[39] for a year, followed by a stint at the British School at Rome. Here they would both finish their training and have first hand access to "the Italian masterpieces of the muralist's art" (Baker, 1944: 172). [40]

From the outset, it was decided that the murals in the ministers' lobby should engage the theme of the 'native races', a subject ripe with possibilities for evoking a sense of the unique romance and exoticism of South Africa. In an ironic reversal of the issues that were to govern South African politics in the post Second World War period, the subject was also, in the context of a threshold to the spaces where political questions would be debated and diplomatic treaties forged, considered politically more neutral than those engaged elsewhere in the building, with their problematic allusions to the 'strenuous' history of Boer and Brit. The original theme for paintings, suggested in 1933, was 'Bushmen' (Barson, 2000: 10). This was eventually rejected in favour of a depiction of the tribal life and customs of "the Amazulu … the paramount native race of Southern Africa" (Price-Lewis, 1948: 70) before the advent, in the unfortunate words of the inscription painted onto a supporting pillar in the room, of 'the white civilisation' (figure 38). True to Baker's injunction that they should imbibe the lessons of "the great [Italian] examples of mural decoration" (Barson, 2000: 10), the young artists were at pains to present various incidents comprising the overall theme in as coherent a way as possible. In best Quattrocento tradition, this is done as a continuous narrative. The warm earth tones with which the scenes are painted,

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[39] Herbert Baker arranged for the pair to attend the Royal College of Art under Sir William Rothenstein (sometime Director of the Tate Gallery), who in turn passed them on to Professor Tristram and his colleague Professor E.M. Dinkel, both experts in mural painting (Barson, 2000: 10).

[40] Le Roux Smith Le Roux, (1914 – 1963); Eleanor Esmonde-White (b. 1914). After completing the South Africa House commission, Le Roux Smith Le Roux went into arts administration in South Africa, while continuing to work as a mural painter (notably for the Old Mutual building in Cape Town (1941) – see Chapter 4). In the late 1940s he returned to London to join the staff at London's Tate Gallery, and went on to become Deputy Keeper of the Tate (1950 – 54). He fell out with Director, Sir John Rothenstein (whom he had first encountered while working on the South Africa House project) after he leaked accusations to the British press of Rothenstein's maltreatment of Tate staff, misappropriation of funds, and purchasing pictures at inflated prices. Prevented from responding to these allegations because of a civil servant law, Rothenstein was subjected to scandal and humiliation, but not before Le Roux was sacked. The British newspapers dubbed the incident the 'Tate Affair' (Rothenstein, 1966). Eleanor Esmonde-White remained in London and worked as designer and mural painter. She collaborated again with Le Roux on murals for the liner *Queen Elizabeth* (1938) and at the Imperial Institute and Science Museum in London. In 1942, she returned to South Africa to begin work on murals in the Magistrate's Court in Johannesburg. She returned to London in the early 1950s to decorate Overland Pavilion at Festival of Britain (see Berman, Ogilvie, *et al*), after which she moved to Greece.

however, leave no doubt as to the romanticised notions of 'Africa' that they intend to invoke.

The unbroken expanse of wall to the right of the entrance is on the theme of 'the Feast of the First Fruits,' (figure 39) and depicts King Shaka surrounded by his counsellors and bodyguards, with a witchdoctor in attendance, while three ceremonial oxen represent the king's red, white and black royal herds (Barson, 2000: 10). On the fringes of the painting groups of maidens and warriors join the festival rituals, while others get on with the everyday tasks of farming, hunting and domestic chores. A wedding ceremony, presided over by an elaborately costumed female witchdoctor, is depicted on the opposite wall (figure 40), with the bride being prepared for a ceremonial bath in the background. In the next panel a group of unarmed youths, some of whom strike flamboyantly mannered poses (the unexpected side effect, perhaps, of too much exposure on the part of the artists to Italian Renaissance murals in Rome), slaughter a black bull (figure 41).

The 'Zulu Room', as it soon and inevitably became known, was officially opened on 16 May 1938 by Princess Alice, countess of Athlone, and caused a flurry of interest in the British and South African press. *The Times* praised its technical accomplishments effusively, and noted that:

> On the illustrative side the work must have entailed a great deal of research, and it will form a valuable record of passing customs and crafts in South Africa (*The Times*, 17 May 1938, 21, *cit*. Barson 2000: 10).

South Africa (1938: 229) reiterated this sentiment, describing the murals as depicting

> the life of the Zulu people as it was a century ago when tribal ceremonials were intact. Festivals, harvesting, hunting, and marriage ceremonials form the themes, and into the landscape setting the artists have woven the typical flora and fauna of Zululand. Close research alike into anthropology, botany, and natural history have endowed the paintings with a vivid and intimate interest.

This once again reinforces the notion that the decorative programme of the South Africa House was both 'authentic' and 'historically accurate'. To the postcolonial observer, however, it is clear that the elaborate staging of a prelapsarian pastoral idyll, coupled with an eclectic and anachronistic combination of quasi-anthropological elements, is more concerned with reinforcing contemporary European notions of the African as the primitive, exotic Other, than acknowledging and celebrating indigenous culture (figure 42). This is reinforced

as much in the choice of narrative scenes that in effect present a stereotyped, frozen ethnic image, as in the deliberately naïve style and references to the canon of 'primitive' art. This is evident in terms of both quotations from San rock paintings, and a sideways acknowledgement of Gauguin's Tahitian paintings in some elements of the composition.

The choice of the Zulu as the subject for this programme is also telling in this regard. As various writers have shown (Nettleton, 1988; Hamilton, 1998, and Coombes, 2003), the Zulus had been singled out by the early twentieth century as an African race that was somehow superior to, if not necessarily more 'civilised' than other indigenous South African peoples. In Britain the popular conception of the Zulu was informed as much by H. Rider Haggard's epic tales of adventure featuring Zulu protagonists, as it was to the reputation they had acquired during the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879 as "fearless fighters and formidable military strategists" (Coombes, 2003: 285) motivated by a healthy respect for an absolute monarch. *South Africa* (1938: 229), in its report on the unveiling ceremony, in fact found the latter a significant aspect of the frescoes' iconography. In its description of the 'Feast of the First Fruits', it noted that

> in the old days no one might touch the new crops before the propitious moment when the king, as the instrument of the unseen powers, had conferred his blessing. The scene is reproduced with great dignity of treatment. Again the indunas seated in a circle all but adore their unquestioned monarch.

It is partly as a consequence of this 'unquestioned' monarchism that, as Anitra Nettleton (1988: 50) puts it, "the British were ambivalent in their attitude toward the Zulu, and in spite of the interminable wars they fought against them this group emerged in the discourse of colonialism as a 'cut above the rest' of Southern African black peoples." The image of the Zulu thus neatly condenses a number of complexities underlying European colonialists' construction of the black African: on the one hand a picturesque and exotic creature, linked atavistically to the land that he inhabits, and with an innate subservience to absolute authority, and on the other a bloodthirsty savage that needed to be tamed and controlled.

In an era where detribalisation and urbanisation were of increasing concern to white South Africans, the ostensibly anthropological exactitude also serves as a reminder of the nascent interest at Afrikaans-medium universities in the 1930s in what was by the 1950s to be formalised as *volkekunde*; a uniquely home-grown

and disreputable form of ethnology based ostensibly on the 'study of peoples', but in fact a thinly-veiled form of cultural eugenics.[41] The first department of *volkekunde* had been established at Stellenbosch University by Professor W. W. M Eiselen in 1928, and followed in short order by departments at Pretoria University, UNISA and the Orange Free State (Sharp, 1981: 29). The notion of the *volkskondisioneerde persoonlikheid* ('ethnically conditioned personality') that lay at the heart of the *volkekunde* notion of *ethnos*, or the relationship of people to their culture (Todeschini, 2003: 2), was a useful way of maintaining the *status quo* of white racial superiority in the evolving taxonomies of what would become apartheid.

Mythic constructions of the Other are surprisingly persistent. On my visit to South Africa House in August 2004, I found a pamphlet – prominently displayed amongst the miscellany of advertising material invariably found in the foyers of public buildings – from the Royal Artillery Museum advertising a two-day extravaganza entitled *Redcoats and Zulus* (figure 43). Accompanying a lurid illustration of a Zulu warrior brandishing a spear and a shield, superimposed on a rag-tag group of British soldiers bristling with rifles and bayonets, was a list of the promised attractions. "Zulu War Dancers'; 'Zulu Exhibition'; 'Zulu Artefacts'; '30 min[ute] making of the 1964 film 'Zulu'"; the irresistible promise of "Medal Displays (Lt. Bromhead VC and Lt. Chard VC)" as well as the intriguing sounding "1879 Re-enactors". The promise of 'history and romance', after all is said and done, seems to be alive and well in South Africa House. Baker would have been pleased.

Lavish and unusually complete, the decorative programme of South Africa House presents a rare case study for unpacking the imaginary of fusion politics and the implicit tensions between imperialism and nationalism. It is significant that the artists associated with the project went on, as I show in Chapters 3 and

[41] In addition to creating the binaries between native 'savagery' and colonial 'civilisation', the presence of imagery of 'natives', here and, as I show in subsequent Chapters, elsewhere, clearly acknowledges an autochthonous African presence in southern Africa. In their attempts at legitimizing white claims to the land, the ideologues of Afrikaner nationalism would later deny that Bantu speakers had arrived earlier than the colonists. The fantasy of the 'promised land' implicit in this notion of virgin territory would also become one of the central tenets of the 'civil religion' of Afrikanerdom from the 1930s onwards, first through the re-enactment of the Great Trek during the centenary celebrations in 1938 and ultimately reaching its apotheosis with the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument.

4, to execute important commissions[42] for public buildings throughout the 1930s, and in so doing restated and amplified the themes presented here: the 'discovery' by Europe of 'virgin territory' and the colonists' consequent right to mineral and agricultural wealth; the need to tame the 'savage' and beam into the 'dark continent' the light of Christian 'civilisation'; the heroism and bravery of pioneer settlers, and, above all the possibility for the 'two (white) races' of a peaceful and profitable co-existence. After 1948, of course, these clumsy tropes of bravery and divinely sanctioned conquest were increasingly conflated with the exclusive and unflinchingly racist ideology of Afrikaner nationalism, and South Africa House, once the ostensible 'Monument to Concord and Amity' became the infamous target of furious anti-apartheid demonstrations.

More than a decade into democracy, and with another twenty-odd years before the South African government's lease on the property expires, the decorative programme, with its outdated subject matter, discredited points of reference, and repellently anachronistic politics, presents obvious problems to a post-colonial black government. However, since the building and its fixtures (including the murals and other decorative elements) is listed by the conservation body English Heritage as a protected building, the South African government may neither remove nor destroy any aspect of the decorative programme. The initial expedient of simply covering the offending artefacts (Barson, 2000: 16) has since been replaced by more carefully considered – if not wholly satisfactory – solution, one that aims to set up a postcolonial dialogue with the works, and in so doing reconstruct their history. Thick sheets of glass of the exact dimensions of the paintings have been fixed over the murals (figure 44), and South African artists have been commissioned to create works on these panels that will "contextualise the existing symbols and functions by way of increased transparency and layered portals bridging past, present and future" (De Smidt, 2000: 3).

At the time of writing, these remedial commissions were however – with one exception – still waiting to be executed. As it stands at the moment the thick layers of glass over the murals ironically seem to function more as a protective screen, shielding them, like the *Mona Lisa*, from the unwelcome attentions of

[42] These included, amongst others, Amshewitz's commissions for the Pretoria City Hall, the Cape Town General Post Office, the University of the Witwatersrand Library; Juta's commissions for the Pretoria City Hall; Le Roux's commissions for the Old Mutual Building in Cape Town; Esmonde-White's commissions for the Magistrate's Court in Johannesburg, with Pierneef increasingly the undisputed – at least in Afrikaner nationalist circles – contemporary 'master'.

overly passionate viewers, than as 'portals' through which they can be re-interpreted. In fact, the overwhelming effect of South Africa House today is rather like that of a stuffy, old-fashioned museum, where static, unimaginative displays and obdurate glass surfaces discourage any active engagement, while the building's occupants – anaesthetised, perhaps, through prolonged exposure – seem largely indifferent both to the decorative programme, and to the debates that its continued existence has prompted. Given the hype surrounding recent South African public buildings for which elaborate decorative programmes were commissioned and extravagant claims made for the ways in which they contribute towards turning the fraught 'space' of a divided country into the unified 'place' of nationhood (see Chapter 5), the example of South Africa House begs a difficult question. To what extent can public buildings and public art validly engage a nationalist imaginary and a history of 'belonging'?

In the final analysis the lessons of South Africa House are clear: while nothing, to paraphrase Robert Hughes (1979), dates faster than people's ideas of the future, few things can be more fraught than laboured evocations of their past. In the context of fusion politics, however, the past – or at least an imagined version of it – was the most useful way for constructing an identity of unity in diversity. When brought closer to home, this strategy, as I discuss in the next chapter, assumes a somewhat more fraught quality.

The task of ideology is to present the position of the subject as fixed and unchangeable, an element in a given system of differences which is human in nature and the world of human experience, and to show possible action as an endless repetition of normal 'familiar' action. – Belsey (1980: 90)

CHAPTER THREE: The fine art of fusion 2 – the Pretoria City Hall (1935)[1]

When J. H. Amshewitz first showed his painting *Onward* (figure 45) in Johannesburg in 1937, donated to the recently completed Pretoria City Hall (figure 46) by Michael Haskel (who had sponsored Amshewitz's three panels in South Africa House (see Chapter 2)) – and where it still occupies pride of place in the foyer – the Bishop of Pretoria, the Rt. Rev. Wilfred Parker, had the following to say about its role in "unifying the three races of South Africa":

> We are here to admire the artistic creation of a Jewish painter who here depicts an episode in the stormy life of our Dutch friends and forefathers, and here am I, an English bishop, opening the Exhibition. It is thus we affirm our nationhood and determination to work together as lovers of Art and lovers of South Africa (*cit.* Amshewitz, 1951: 21).

This statement, the painting that prompted it, and the building in which it is housed, to my mind, encapsulate many of the contradictions and complexities underlying notions of identity and nationhood in South Africa in the 1930s, some of which have been explored in relation to South Africa House in Chapter 2. Using Amshewitz's painting as a point of departure, I argue in this chapter that these same issues, when brought closer to home, reveal the complex and sometimes conflicting notions of what it meant to be a white – and, largely by omission, black – South African during this turbulent decade. By implication, it adds into the mix another fraught stereotype of 1930s politics, the spectre of 'Hoggenheimer,' or the money-hungry Jew, vividly – if ambiguously – brought to

[1] A shorter version of this chapter has been published as 'Imagining Fusion: The Politics of South Africanism as Reflected in the Decorative Programme of the Pretoria City Hall (1935)', *De Arte* 69, September 2004.

life in the popular imagination in contemporary political cartoons.[2]

3.1 Imagining 'three races': the Amshewitz mural

Although Amshewitz's prodigious *oeuvre* is characterised by various phases and a wide range of subjects he was, as is evidenced by the paintings discussed in Chapter 2, for the most part occupied with portraits and historical narratives in the grand academic tradition. *Onward* belongs to a particularly prolific period of mural commissions, all on themes relating to South African colonial history.[3] Like these paintings, its heavy-handed symbolism and self-conscious *gravitas* resonates strongly with contemporary notions of nation building as reflected across the spectrum of socio-cultural activity, or the visual manifestations of ideology that Anne McClintock (1993: 70) describes as the "mass national commodity spectacle." From the commissioning of paintings and sculptures for public buildings throughout the decade, through the historical pageants and *tableaux vivants* that formed the cultural core of the 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg, to W.H. Coetzer's Great Trek commemorative postage stamps of 1938, the message was the same. White South Africans, regardless of their cultural and linguistic differences, shared a common destiny, founded on the pioneering spirit and civilizing mission of their European forebears.

Within the context of the complex dynamics of race, culture and identity, which then, as now, informed South African politics, the impetus for this kind of identification largely arose – as I have discussed in Chapter 2 – from Smuts's and Hertzog's centrist political stance that tended to subordinate majority Afrikaner identity to a united white South Africanist identity. The arguments regarding the cultural manifestations of the inevitable corollary of this policy, namely, the

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[2] Gideon Shimoni (1980) points out that in the 1920s Hertzog's National Party, had assumed, based on a presumed anti-imperialism, that the Jewish vote could be won over to the Afrikaner camp. However, the elections in 1929 clearly showed that these hopes of the Nationalists were deceptive: Jewish votes had predominantly supported Smuts's empire-oriented South African Party.

[3] These include, in addition to the South Africa House discussed in Chapter 2, *Vasco da Gama Leaving Portugal* for the University of the Witwatersrand, 1935 (also sponsored by Michael Haskel); *A Harvest Festival* commissioned by the Union Castle Steamship Co., 1935; *Pretoria Pioneers* and South *African Industries*, for the Central Government Offices in Pretoria, 1938, commissioned by the Public Works Department, who also commissioned two paintings for the new General Post Office in Cape Town, *Lady Anne Barnard leaving the Castle* and *Jan van Riebeeck saluting the Flag*, 1941. The early 1940s also saw the completion of private commissions dealing with similar themes, most notably three murals for the Wynberg, Cape Town home of one Charles G. Saker, (*The Landing of van Riebeeck* , another version of the General Post Office panel, and two paintings on the theme of *Bygone days at the Cape*) and a 'Voortrekker' painting entitled *Die Biduur* for Colonel P.I. Hoogenout, Administrator of South West Africa. See Amshewitz (1951) for reproductions and descriptions of these works.

increasing visibility and intransigence of Afrikaner nationalism have been thoroughly rehearsed elsewhere (see Chapter 1), and it is not my intention to further them here. I want to point, rather, to the slippages that occur when different constituencies engage the same visual rhetoric of nationalism in order to legitimate competing claims to power.

Which brings us back to where we started, the Rt. Rev. Parker celebrating the ostensible unifying properties of Amshewitz's painting: the painting depicts a scene from the Great Trek, showing a group of Voortrekkers about to break laager. The background hustle-and-bustle is overshadowed by a static arrangement of four figures in the foreground. Within this group, the central standing figure of a man is in the conventionalised heroic pose of the Augustus of the Prima Porta,[4] the flag of the old Transvaal republic waving dramatically – if somewhat anachronistically – over his shoulder while he points resolutely 'onward' (figure 47). This figure's resemblance to a young Jan Smuts did not go unnoticed by a contemporary audience. "When General and Mrs. Smuts visited the exhibition," writes Sarah Amshewitz (1951: 27) in her husband's biography,

> Mrs. Smuts, like many others, remarked on the central figure's resemblance to the Oubaas – the Field Marshal – as a young man. Amshewitz was a great admirer of the noble strength of Smuts'ss countenance and was inspired to use his features to symbolize the Voortrekker type.

Amshewitz was not alone in his idealising of Smuts. As Giliomee (2003: 394) notes,

> Smuts captivated English-speaking South Africa. Here was an Afrikaner who had fought bravely on the Boer side in the Anglo-Boer War and had also served in the British war cabinet. He was unmistakably Afrikaans in the accent and idiom in which he spoke, with a private life free of any affectation, yet politicians, newspaper editors, and renowned scholars in Britain, Europe and the United States considered him one of the great intellects of his time.

Smuts was also, of course, in his politics as well as his philosophical musings, the very embodiment of the spirit of 'unity in diversity'. His figurative presence in this work – however diluted – thus resonates powerfully with the ideological subtext of the decorative programme of this building as a whole.

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[4] The composition is also reminiscent of Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, and thus resonates further with heroic associations, albeit those engaging notions of civil rebellion. In the absence of proof in the form of preparatory studies we cannot know whether these references to art historical models were intentional, but it is clear that Amshewitz intended to construct as conventionally heroic a scene as possible.

Despite the academic obsession with historical exactitude – the rifles and powder horn, for example, were modelled on those used by the Voortrekker leader Andries Pretorius (Amshewitz, 1951: 42) – Amshewtiz allowed himself some poetic licence in the service of "grandeur and nobility" (Amshewitz, 1951: 28). This flag is, in fact, the *Vierkleur*, which in fact only came into being with the establishment of the South African Republic long after the conclusion of the Trek. The scene is dominated, however, by the statuesque female figure in the foreground. Staring grimly into the middle distance, she is clearly a *volksmoeder* not to be trifled with. While cradling a baby in one arm, she passes a pistol to a teenaged boy, already armed with a rifle, at her feet (figure 48). A third female figure, equally statuesque but perhaps a little gentler of demeanour, stares rapturously up at her while brandishing a rifle.[5] In composition, the painting conforms to the conventionalised narrative devices of academic history painting. The strong diagonal slope of this rifle's barrel, along with the whip of a driver to the left of the central group and the standing figure's outstretched arm combine compositionally to reinforce the central message of moving resolutely 'onward', despite the dangers that lurk out of our sight beyond the edges of the painting.

By means of these simple rhetorical devices, with their intimations of danger, violence and courage, Amshewitz has managed neatly to condense a number of contemporary notions regarding the role of women in the nationalist project. This is ostensibly the result of his background research, which led him to the conclusion that "the women played a more heroic part [in the Trek] than the men" (Amshewitz, 1951: 27). However, we can now see that he was in fact buying into contemporary stereotypes that increasingly aimed to locate nationalism at its potentially most potent source: the mother as bearer of cultural tradition and language. Enfranchised by Hertzog in 1930 – largely to dilute further the already attenuated black vote (Beinart, 1994; Davenport, 1991) – white women began to play an increasingly prominent role in nationalist ideology in the 1930s. Consequently, as various writers[6] have shown, the image of the *volksmoeder* had undergone, in the two decades following the conclusion of

[5] Sarah Amshewitz (1951: 28) describes how, shortly after the unveiling of the painting, it was announced in the press and on the wireless that the painting had been damaged. "On going to Pretoria to investigate," she writes, "[Amshewitz] found a series of 'kisses' in pencil on the arm of the girl in the foreground, placed there by an exuberant youth during a wedding celebration."

[6] See, *inter alia*, Isabel Hofmeyr (1986), Elsabé Brink (1990), Liese van der Watt (1996 and 1998), Marijke du Toit (2003).

the South African War, something of a metamorphosis. The image of domestic piety and resignation in the face of suffering that marked her first appearance in the popular imagination, came by the 1930s to be replaced by that of a strong, resourceful woman; fearless, courageous, and possessed of a fortitude that made trekking '*kaalvoet oor die Drakensberge*' and bravely resisting heathen hordes as much part of a day's work as raising children. Amshewitz's *volksmoeder* clearly belongs to this category. While the flag-holding patriarch represents the somewhat abstract ideal of the conquering hero in the tradition of countless public sculptures, the complex weave of nurturing, protection and implicit violence woven by the seemingly incompatible elements of powder horn, pistol and baby, place her unequivocally within the politically charged gender discourse of the 1930s.

Elsabé Brink summarises this shift as "the Afrikaner woman [being] depicted not only as the cornerstone of the household but also … [being] expected to fulfil a political role as well" (Brink, 1990: 273). Given the complex dynamics informing the commission of this work, however – a Jewish donor, a British Jewish artist, a city council composed largely of United Party worthies and presided over by a Jewish mayor[7]– it would seem that, in the context of the Pretoria City Hall at least, Amshewitz's *volksmoeder* comes to represent more than that which the narrow discourse of Afrikaner nationalism would allow. Of course in retrospect – given what we now know of the unflinching racism that accompanied the mythic construction of the Voortrekkers' place in Afrikaner nationalist history, and the role that the city of Pretoria was to play after 1948 as the epicentre of apartheid bureaucracy – the good Archbishop's conceit is almost humorous in its irony. Also in these terms, Amshewitz's clumsy tropes of motherhood and bravery have assumed a darker and somewhat more sinister layer of meaning.

However, if we are to understand her in her original conception, she invites identification with a broader imaginary, in effect representing the Mother of the (fused) Nation. Being both literally and metaphorically (*vide* the anachronistic *Vierkleur*) positioned in the former capital of the South African Republic, she clearly pays lip service to Afrikaner ideals and aspirations, while on the other hand she equally represents a powerful archetype of the indomitable spirit of

[7] Ivan Solomon, mayor of Pretoria 1932 – 36.

motherhood that cuts across the British/Afrikaner ideological divide. Furthermore, it would also appear that, given the celebrated Jewish connection in the commissioning circumstances, the implicit 'promised land' scenario found a certain concordance within the Jewish community, and hence the Archbishop's allusion to Amshewitz's being a Jew. Michael Haskel, the painting's patron, was an ardent Zionist who, at the time of both the South Africa House and Pretoria City Hall commissions, was serving as South Africa's Honorary Commissioner in Palestine.

Similar complexities regarding the gendered construction of political identity and culture inform two further mural programmes in the building. A sum of £2,000 having been donated for the purpose,[8] the City Council commissioned two large murals for the Council Chamber from Jan Juta, and six smaller panels for the upstairs concert hall from Anton Hendriks.[9] Both these programmes were installed, along with the Amshewitz, in 1938. In scope and iconography these two programmes both reflect the different functions of the spaces that they embellish, whilst they both (in different ways) also address the social imaginary of fusion politics.

3.2 The erotics of culture: the Hendriks murals

Hendriks's pastel-hued panels depict stylised female figures, three singly and three in pairs, clad in indeterminate 'period' dress, and set in romanticised evocations of the Cape. The panels are unsigned and untitled, but at first glance appear be quasi-allegorical representations of 'culture,' 'learning', and 'civilisation.' This subject was no doubt seen as appropriate to the decoration of a hall to be used predominantly for smaller scale cultural and leisure activities (whereas the main hall would serve both large-scale cultural as well as political and/or civic events). In these terms, the panels serve their setting well, providing genteel and iconographically appropriate embellishments in the conventionalised

[8] "Pretoria's £300,000 City Hall", *South Africa*, January 4, 1936, p. 5 notes that "two … well-known citizens, Mr. John Kirkness and Mr. Charles Maggs, have subscribed £2,000 for mural paintings [for the City Hall]."

[9] Petrus Anton Hendriks, b. Rotterdam, 1899, d. Paris 1975. Like Juta, Hendriks executed a number of mural commissions during this time. Juta had just completed his nine murals for South Africa House in London (1933), while Hendriks had produced paintings for the Voortrekker Gedenksaal (1934, demolished), the Johannesburg Post Office (1936) (see figures 51 – 53), and the General Mining Building, Johannesburg (1938).

art deco style then fashionable. A closer analysis, however, suggests that these panels may in fact have something more to say beyond the merely decorative.

Let us consider the choice of the Cape as a setting: an implicit narrative is constructed around the imagery of the Cape, starting with the two panels placed next to each other on the east wall, which suggest its initial colonisation. In both panels, the figures are set against the backdrop of Table Bay. The left hand panel depicts a standing woman holding a model of a seventeenth-century galleon[10] (figure 49), while her companion is seated with an enormous book open on her lap, the virgin pages of which suggest that a new story is about to begin. Behind them, ships in full sail enter the bay. The blank pages of the book, it is implied, are not to remain that way for much longer. The single figure in the right hand panel proudly holds an orb – symbol of imperial conquest – in one hand, while resting the other possessively on an astrolabe – the principal instrument for the measurement of latitude before the invention of the sextant in the 1670s – supported Atlas-like by a doughty cherub (figure 53). Behind her, a ship with furled sails lies anchored in the harbour, while a neoclassical building has – somewhat anachronistically – sprung up on the shore. Civilisation, it is implied, has thus taken root, with the promise of more to come. On the opposite wall civilisation is in full swing: a ballerina, eternally *en pointe*, poses against the backdrop of a distant Cape Dutch homestead with two dancing couples enlivening the middle distance (figure 54). In the panel on her right, a flautist and lutenist make music, once again, against the backdrop of a Cape Dutch homestead (figure 55). On the south (entrance) wall a latter-day female Orpheus tames the wildness of Africa from the relative safety of her neoclassical garden (figure 56), while in the panel on her right two figures – one standing, one semi-recumbent in a 'Boland' setting – seem to suggest the civilised balance of the active and contemplative life (figure 57).

While at first glance this evocation of the Cape may seem incongruous with a decorative scheme for the Pretoria City Hall, the implicit conflation of notions of 'civilisation' with the Cape is part of a wider contemporary discourse that constructed the Cape as the mythic bastion of white culture and learning. In these terms, the Cape is seen, in effect, as the seat of the vaunted cultivation and

[10] Although the word 'galleon' is associated more with Spanish ships of this period, this type of vessel – designed in England in the 1570s – was widely used in the 17th century as the principal type of trading ship of the Dutch East India Company.

sophistication of the sedentary counterparts of the Boers, the so-called 'Cape Dutch liberals'.[11] Related to this construction of the Cape as cultural heartland of South Africa is the valorising, from the early decades of the twentieth century, of Cape Dutch architecture as the quintessential expression of white South African civilisation; at once a truly national style, but still rooted in an unbroken historical identification with the civilising influence of its European origins. Herbert Baker's celebrating of the Cape Dutch style in the service of British imperialism (see Chapters 1 and 2) had by the 1930s given way to the jingoistic rhetoric of Afrikaner nationalism. I have already shown in the Introduction how Gerhard Moerdijk, for example, would claim in 1932 that "the Cape Dutch style of architecture is as Afrikaans a product as the Afrikaans language, the Afrikaner bull, and, in the final analysis, the Afrikaner himself" (Moerdijk, 1932; my translation).

This serves also to enlighten the choice of certain 'Cape Dutch' elements that appear in the otherwise stylised neoclassical architecture of the Pretoria City Hall, notably the design of the doors and fanlights (figure 58). In the context of the City Hall, these references to the Cape are thus sufficiently ambiguous so as to appeal both to the incipient patriotism of those who wished to see themselves as scions of a long line of liberal humanists, as well as those wished to identify with the authority of 'authentic' Afrikaner forms. Whichever way the ideology swung, the Cape remained a reference point, as powerful as it was obvious, for the notions of European civilisation in Africa,[12] and it is clearly these tropes that Hendriks evokes in his seemingly innocuous panels.

The conflation of notions of 'civilisation' with 'femininity' in turn raise some interesting points *a propos* the *volksmoeder* discourse raised earlier. By no stretch of the imagination can these women be described as *volksmoeders*, at least in so far as that term is conventionally used to describe a woman of somewhat more maternal aspect than these crinoline-clad maidens would suggest. However, notwithstanding their allegorical roles described above, they

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[11] See Le May (1995: 5ff.) for a discussion of the 'liberal Afrikaner' heritage in particularly the De Villiers and Hofmeyr lineages.

[12] The importance of the Cape as a reference point for the notions of civilization in South Africa in the 1930s was made very clear by the symbolic lighting of an 'eternal flame of civilisation' at the foot of Jan van Riebeeck's statue in Cape Town on the eve of the 1938 Great Trek centenary celebrations. From there, torchbearers carried it to Pretoria where it was enshrined in the Voortrekker Monument, and where – its odious connotations notwithstanding – it continues to flicker to this day (Delmont, 1993: 99).

also serve to evoke a romanticised vision of the pre-Trek days; prelapsarian states of innocence, as it were. Given the complex dynamics underlying the depiction of women in the discourse of nationalism in this period, I would argue that this conflation of femininity with the charged cultural rhetoric of the Cape serves as a reminder of the essential femininity of the *volksmoeder*. Under that modest apron and prim *kappie*, it seems to imply, still lurks a sensual, if not to say sexual, being. These paintings thus not only legitimate notions of white South African culture in terms of an appeal to 'history', but also hint at a new stereotype of the modern South African woman as viewed through the lens of middle class patriarchy: as cultured as she is pragmatic, and as willing to embrace the sensual aspects of marriage as the spiritual.

3.3 Paradise lost and found: the Juta murals

Of the two programmes, however, Juta's is both more didactic and more self-consciously politicised than Hendriks's. "This week I met Mr. Jan Juta, the artist," wrote a reporter for the *Cape Argus* (AAD/1993/9: 19 December 1936),

> who is back in South Africa after an absence of nearly 20 years, and who, for the first time in his career, is to paint for the country of his birth. Following on the success of his murals for the decoration of South Africa House, he has been invited to do the murals for the council Chamber in the new City Hall in Pretoria … South African history is so dramatic, says Mr. Juta, that it offers the best possible field for mural work.

Dramatic as South African history might have appeared, in these panels Juta simply returned, almost verbatim, to the themes engaged in the *1820 Settlers* and *Voortrekker* panels in South Africa House, and with much the same ideological intention. Facing each other across the gloom of the well-appointed Council Chamber (figure 59), the two enormous panels combine to construct a history of white South Africans in which the fates of the English and the Afrikaners are seen as inextricably linked. By means of a number of deft elisions and lacunae, Juta thus seems to invite the councillors – regardless of their home language – to imagine themselves, during the long hours of council meetings, as the legitimate heirs to an idyllic homeland, populated by helpful, self-effacing natives and promising a rich bounty as a reward for capitalist travails.

The narrative reads from left to right, starting from the painting on the left hand side of the entrance to the chamber (figure 60). Below the panel, and clearly intended to be read as both its title as well as its *raison d'être*, is a quotation from the Voortrekker leader, Pieter Uys:

> "*Ek is diep ongelukkig om van soveel goeie vriende afskeid te neem, maar ek vertrou dat ons verenigd in die gees sal bly, solank as ons aan hierdie sy van die graf verkeer, al is ons ook geskei deur afstand.*" (I am deeply unhappy to be taking my leave of so many good friends, but I trust that we shall remain united in spirit, so long as we remain on this side of the grave, although we may be separated by distance (my translation).)

The dates '1820' and '1837' are placed like parentheses on either side of this quotation. These dates serve to locate the painting within a specific historical context, '1820' referring of course to the first major wave of British immigration, while '1837' refers to first major exodus of Trekkers from the Cape. The real 'subject' of the painting, however, is expressed through the central group. A Boer patriarch – identifiable by his serviceable brown suit, as well as the contact that he establishes with a woman in a *kappie* and a similarly clad man arrayed with a powder horn and rifle – is handed a Bible by a man whose tailcoat and similarly clad companions, one of whom holds a top hat, identify him as British. Behind them, a group of trekkers observe the scene in suitably reverent attitudes, with the exception of one individual who waves his hat from the back of one of the two ox wagons behind them, as if impatient to get on with the trek (figure 61).

The scene depicted here is in fact taken from an episode in the early history of the Great Trek, in which the British frontier settlers presented a Bible to the Trek leader Jacobus Uys on the eve of his departure. As the *Rand Daily Mail* (AAD/1993/9) put it: "[the painting] shows Mr. Thompson, a leading resident of Albany, presenting a Bible to Jacobus Uys, the Voortrekker leader, on behalf of the residents of Albany just before this trek set out into the union in 1837".[13] Interestingly, this scene was originally mooted as the subject for Juta's South Africa House *Voortrekker* panel. Te Water (1934a: 263) had announced at the official unveiling of the South Africa House murals (by which time Juta had only completed the *Vergelegen* and the ill-fated *Landing of Jan van Riebeeck* panels) that

> the last panel of this series is to be of an episode …, which carries our history into the period of English rule, and symbolises the first prophetic gesture of racial friendliness between the English and the Dutch races in South Africa. An episode now forgotten, not consummated by the happy events of the year which we are now celebrating. For it was nearly a hundred years ago, in 1837, that the English Settlers presented to the patriarch Jacobus Uys and his Voortrekkers, on their trek from Graaf

[13] The report goes on to note that, "it is interesting to note that the actual Bible which was handed over is in the Transvaal Museum, the building immediately facing the City Hall in which the mural will be placed."

> Reinet through Grahamstown to the North, a Bible, as a token of their admiration for the religious qualities of the Boers, and as an appreciation of their kindliness and hospitality to the 1820 Settlers in those times of trial and need.

However, as we have seen in Chapter 2, this painting never materialised in South Africa House, and I have been unable to trace any records that would explain why this is so. Certainly, the extant South Africa House paintings (figures 24 and 26), with their dramatic sweep of landscape and sense of place, are more in keeping with the Pierneefs in the Exhibition Hall, indicating that this might be another example of Baker's need for decorative consistency prevailing over Te Water's desire for political correctness. The extant painting also, true to Baker's desire for 'romance' is certainly more heroic in character.

Te Water would have been pleased to know that the episode would not remain forgotten for long. The same scene is depicted in Panel 2 of the carved frieze in the Voortrekker Monument, where it functions, as Elizabeth Delmont (1993: 96) points out, to reinforce the myth of the Trekkers as peaceable pioneers, respectful of those with whom they came into contact, rather than conquerors. She goes on to show how this scene also suggests that the Trekkers and the British frontier settlers were thus being constructed as "allies in a common cause" (Delmont, 1993: 97), and it is clearly this politically expedient interpretation of the scene that Juta is evoking in the Pretoria City Hall panel.

The general meaning of the panel is thus straightforward: two groups of pioneers, one British, one Dutch (or, by extension, Afrikaner), contend with the vicissitudes of the pioneer life in order to realize their joint destiny of the 'promised land.' The consequent foregrounding of a sense of co-operation and pioneering spirit, legitimated by the presence of the Bible, thus neatly glosses over any lingering sense of the Boer and Brit divide, or the historical facts regarding the fraught Boer – Brit politics that served as a catalyst for the Trek. *Die Burger* (7 June 1938), reporting on the newly unveiled paintings, was quick to recognise the implications of the iconography:

> This painting represents the [giving of the] gift of the English inhabitants of the Eastern Cape in the united defence by Boer and Brit against Kaffir attacks in the same period. The wagons on the extreme right are a representation of the settlers, who came to assist with the development of the land. At the very back, a section of Algoa Bay is to be seen as the place of landing of the settlers, and represents the place where Grahamstown is

> today. The wagons in the background are those of the Voortrekkers for their long trek to the north (my translation).[14]

In the context of the fusion politics of the 1930s the implications of Juta's convenient eliding of history speaks for itself.

Within this heavy-handed politicking, however, some sub-themes are developed in more detail, and are worth commenting on. Firstly, the *volksmoeder* rears her motherly head once again, this time in a number of guises. Virtually as a restatement of the South Africa House '1820 Settlers' panel, she appears on the left of the panel in the person of an Englishwoman (identifiable thus as much by the fact that she is located on the '1820' side of the panel, as by her costume and neatly furled umbrella) cradling a baby (figure 62). Here the conflation of the maternal archetype with the pioneer is clearly a trope for a new nation. That the *volksmoeder* is depicted as English not only has powerful resonance in terms of fusion politics, but could also be read as a sideways acknowledgement of the fact that the South African women's suffrage movement in South Africa in the 1920s had been driven largely by middle-class English-speaking women (Beinart, 1994: 110).

At the other end of the panel, above '1837', we encounter the no-nonsense, assertive *volksmoeder* in the person of two Boer women, one attending to a man whose attitude suggests that he has been wounded in battle, the other with a firm grip on a rifle, a powder horn prominently displayed at her side (figure 63). These *volksmoeders* clearly belong to the confident, pragmatic type discussed in relation to the Amshewitz panel, while also amplifying what Liese van der Watt (1998) – extrapolating from Barbara Melosh's analysis of depictions of frontier life in New Deal American art – identifies as the 'comradely ideal' as part of the *volksmoeder* construct. According to this idea, increasingly promoted as the mythology of the Great Trek gained momentum during the 1930s, Voortrekker women were as brave in battle as the men.[15] Furthermore, the juxtapositioning

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[14] " *…die geskenk van die Engelse bewoners van Oostelike Kaapland in die gesamentlike verdediging deur Boer en Brit teen Kafferaanvalle in dieselfde tydperk. Die waens, heel regs, is 'n voorstelling van setlaars, wat kom help aan die landsontwikkeling. Heel agter is 'n stukkie van Algoabaai te sien as die landingsplek van hierdie toneel, en stel voor die plek waar Grahamstown vandag staan, en die waens op die agtergrond, die van die Trekkers, wat in lang tog na die Noorde.*

[15] This in turn has further political resonance as regards gender relations in the 1930s. As Liese van der Watt notes, "the comradely ideal represented a compromise simultaneously to satisfy the demands for female liberation in the 1920s and 1930s, and to strengthen ailing manhood 'battered by a discredited war and a demoralizing economic depression'" (Van der Watt 1998: 95 quoting B. Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theatre* (Washington and London, 1991)).

of the 'motherly' and 'comradely' ideals on either side of the painting serves once again to stress Elsabé Brink's concept of the dual role of women as both homemaker and political entity as discussed earlier. *Die Burger* (7 June 1938) was unequivocal about this depiction: "*Die vrou regs is die sinnebeeld van die aandeel wat die vrou gehad het in die verdediging teen barbare*" ('the woman on the right is symbolic of the role that women played in the defence against savages' (my translation)).

Secondly, it is interesting to note that only two black people are depicted: an elegantly stylised female figure holding a clay vessel on her head standing behind our '1820' mother, and a whip-wielding cattle driver, clad only in a loincloth, amongst the ox wagons in the '1837' group. Like supernumeraries in a Hollywood epic, these figures play no real part in the action, but nonetheless provide a sense of local colour, as it were, as well as amplifying the symbolic overtones of the main narrative. The positioning of the female figure behind the mother figure is interesting. Again a restatement of the South Africa House paintings, this image is on one level merely a stereotype of the 'native', while the vessel that she balances on her head may, as I have suggested in relation to the South Africa House image, be read in terms of its long association in Western iconography with notions of fecundity and/or virginity. In effect, this painting glosses over the implicit notions of savagery and barbarism that was very much part of the colonialist/Afrikaner nationalist construct of the African Other, and which would be fully developed in later depictions (particularly at the Voortrekker Monument).[16] The herd boy is blissfully unaware both of the rifles bristling around him, as of the intimation of violence suggested by the wounded Boer in the foreground. Thus, while he clearly represents the 'tamed' African, his very presence in the absence of an actual depiction of violence serves as a reminder of the racial conflict that underscored the pioneers' conquest of the interior.

If this panel is at one level an elegy on the theme of 'paradise lost', the panel on the opposite wall clearly expresses 'paradise regained' – and legitimated (figure 64). This time the quotation placed under the painting is from Jan Smuts:

> We are going to build up something new, and in what we shall bring to life, there will be much that comes from Old Dutch, and from English, and from the Native Races of South Africa

[16] See Delmont (1993), Van der Watt (1997), Crampton (2001).

(without getting ahead of the argument, one cannot help but remark on the similarities of this sentiment with the contemporary rhetoric of 'nation building' in South Africa, which is discussed more fully in Chapter 5), this time with the dates '1837' and '1937'. *The Star* (AAD/1993/9: 5 September 1937) described the panel as "an impressive piece of work, symbolising the development of the Transvaal from the earliest days", and summarised its content as follows:

> The central figure of a Voortrekker family is supported by figures engaged in agricultural pursuits; the mines are symbolised by natives; and the history of transport in the Transvaal is suggested by the ox-wagon and the steam engine. The panel is a most satisfying piece of composition, and is probably the biggest of its kind in South Africa.

'1837' now shows the Boers happily ensconced in their hard-won hinterland. At the left of the panel, a *volksmoeder* contentedly cleans a *mielie* while her male companions in shirtsleeves plough the land and pluck fruit from a well-stocked tree. Behind them stretches a neatly cultivated field leading the eye to a typical *plattelandse dorp*, complete with willow trees and church steeple (figure 65). This imagery resonates with countless examples of contemporary landscape paintings – not least the Goodman and Pierneef panels in South Africa House discussed in Chapter 2 – that conflate the neatly ordered landscape with the civilising agricultural mission of the *volk*. This impression is reinforced in these panels, I would argue, by the inclusion in the foreground of 'wild' flora – aloes and cacti – that seem to serve the dual purpose both of celebrating the variety of indigenous flora, while simultaneously suggesting the notion of the incipient wildness of Africa upon which order and civilisation must be imposed.

'1937' at the other extreme of the panel refers to the other source, after agriculture, of South Africa's – and more specifically English-speaking South Africa's – wealth: mining. A man with a pickaxe over his shoulder waves farewell to a figure departing on an ox wagon, while a trusty *volksmoeder*, always at his side, stands with a bundle under her arm (figure 66). To her left a group of well-muscled black miners emerge from a deep pit, their leader placing their bag of spoils at an open book clearly meant to represent a Bible (a juxtaposition that, in retrospect, is impossible not to interpret as a legitimating of exploitation by an appeal to the highest authority. This is entirely in keeping with contemporary constructs of the divinely appointed mission of the *volk*[17]). Behind them, a

[17] See A. du Toit (1983) for a deconstruction of this notion of the Afrikaner *volk* as a Chosen People. See also Chapter 4.

surveyor peers through his theodolite, directing our gaze towards a distant steam train passing over an impressive viaduct, its plume of smoke mingling with the pollution billowing from the factory smokestacks behind it (figure 67). The somewhat compressed narrative thus refers simultaneously both to pioneering mining activities, and to their ultimate result: the modern, industrialised South Africa of 1937. This evocation of modernity both through the obvious references to the machine as well as to what one might call 'iconic pollution' was one of the standard tropes of progress and modernisation in the 1930s. A similar detail, indeed, is evident in the building's tympanum frieze, sculpted by Coert Steynberg (figure 68), and in various examples of decorative panels in pre-cast cement on contemporary buildings in Johannesburg and elsewhere (figure 69).

Once again, the dramatic and symbolic focus is on the central group (figure 70). In what is clearly a quotation from a Renaissance scene of the Adoration of the Magi, 'Joseph', in the form of a Boer patriarch (who bears a marked similarity to the 'Uys' of the opposite panel) looks fondly down at 'Mary' and the 'Holy Infant' in the form of a *volksmoeder* cradling a baby at her breast, while the 'Magi' bring their gifts. A man places a basket full of oranges[18] at her feet while the miners bring their gold, and in the background, a black man strikes a jaunty pose while balancing a basket of fruit on his head. The sense of 'paradise found' is thus expressed very clearly: the *volksmoeder* has been restored to her rightful place – infusing the next generation with the 'mother's milk' of nationalism – with the promise of peace and prosperity for her progeny. The patriarch, swathed in an ammunition belt and clutching a rifle, assumes here the role of a firm but benign leader – the God of the Old Testament who has led His people to the Promised Land, and who will brook no challenge to His authority. Once again, the open Bible in the foreground, as well as the obvious allusions to the Christian iconographic tradition, underscores the notion of a divinely appointed mission. While the imagery here centres largely around the settling and entrenching of the Trekkers (and hence the Afrikaner), this is done in a way which is congruent

[18] According to James Hall's *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* the orange is, in Christian iconography, an alternative for the apple, the traditional fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. When placed in the infant Christ's hand, it alludes to him as the Redeemer of humankind from Original Sin (Hall 1979: 229 – 330). Given the implicit religiosity of Juta's allegory, this symbolism might well have the overt intention of reinforcing once again the notion of the divinely appointed mission of the *volk*.

with the notions of the peaceful, co-operative spirit of the Trek.[19] Once again, *Die Burger* succinctly got the point: "*In die middel op die voorgrond is die Boeregesin, die middelpunt van al hierdie bedrywighede, wat die vrugte van die landbou en nywerheid inoes*" (in the middle in the foreground is the Boer family, the focal point of all this industriousness, harvesting the fruits of agriculture and industry (my translation)). Implicit in this kind of idealism is the notion that the 'two' white races of South Africa are essentially the same: while the Afrikaner identity is brought into the foreground by virtue of the suffering and sacrifices of the Trek, English speakers are invited to identify in the pioneering spirit the proud (and profitable) heritage of their own colonial past.

However, what to make of the absurdly camp black man balancing a basket of fruit, Carmen Miranda-like, on his head (figure 71)? What indeed is one to make of the depiction of black people generally? While none of the characters in this ham-fisted allegory can truly be said to evolve as 'speaking subjects', this is particularly true of the black people. Not only is their less 'civilised' status reinforced by the fact that they are only half-clad, but as agricultural workers they are clearly in a subservient relationship to their white mistress, and as miners their activities are directed entirely towards laying the fruits of their labour at the white man's Bible. This is directly in keeping with contemporary attitudes regarding the segregation of the races, which, as Saul Dubow (1989: 31) shows, was informed by the unshakeable belief in "white supremacy as the natural order of things." In these terms, Dubow continues, "Africans were 'naturally' part of the land [while] cities were portrayed as an 'alien environment' for which they were supposedly not yet ready." The presentation, then, of blacks as being at once servile and yet exotic thus resonates strongly with the fusion government's 'Native Policy.' As I have shown in Chapter 2, this policy was premised on the paternalistic "recognition of the Natives as a permanent portion of the population of South Africa *under the Christian trusteeship of the European race*" (*cit*. Le May 1995: 171, my emphasis). The exoticism, on the other hand, embodies all the complexities and contradictions of the colonialist construction of the black. On the one hand the exotic, primitive Other; the embodiment of what

[19] Elizabeth Delmont (1993: 96) quotes W.J.T. Mitchell in drawing attention to the irony of this inversion of power relations in relation to the depiction of the Voortrekkers in the carved friezes of the Voortrekker Monument. "Public art has served as a kind of monumentalising of violence and never more powerfully when it presents the conqueror as a man of peace" (W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art: Do the Right Thing", *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1989-90): 886).

Jordan and Weedon (1996: 320), recalling the West's fascination with 'primitive' cultures, call the "search for unspoilt nature and uncontaminated humanity, [of] the paradise we (modern Westerners) have lost," and on the other hand simply a resource to be exploited.

Our Carmen Miranda figure seems to combine both these ideas. Not only does his gleaming, muscular physique introduce a discordantly carnal note into the otherwise piously domestic scene, but the basket on his head – identifiable as 'African' by its prominent zigzag pattern, and overflowing with good things – seems to suggest that the wealth of Africa is there for the taking.[20] In respect of both of these attributes, he is remarkably similar to the figure that dominates the glass frontage that Juta designed for 44 Main Street, the Headquarters of the Anglo American Corporation, in 1940 (figure 72).

3.4 Conclusion: graveyards of good intentions

By most reasonable contemporary standards, the paintings discussed in this and the preceding chapter are outstandingly bad. Involuntarily kitsch in style, their subject matter is outdated, their points of reference are discredited, and the mythology of a united, white South Africa that they evoke is repellent in its anachronism. At the time of their unveiling, however, they were considered an extraordinary achievement. Of the South Africa House murals, Te Water (1934a: 263) suggested, for example, that they would serve to

> give a nation-wide impetus to South African art, and to make its fine qualities known to the world; that it may be made known to these peoples of Europe, from whom we are descended, that we have lost nothing of our heritage in the passing of time, but perhaps, gained much.

Regarding the Pretoria City Hall panels, the *Daily Express* quoted him as commenting that, "Jan Juta's distinguished and cultured work is far advanced and shows power, imagination and great beauty. Pretoria is to be congratulated on the choice of Juta who is unique in his own field of painting," while an 'Art Lover' wrote to the *Pretoria News*:

> To those of us who are fortunate enough to know the great pictures which adorn the buildings of the old capitals of Europe, Mr. Juta's pictures will come as a revelation for here at last in South Africa, born of South Africa, is a painter in 'the grand manner.' … These are the first paintings I have

[20] Depictions of the scene of the Adoration of the Magi in the later middle ages often included references to the three parts of the known world (Europe, Africa and Asia), as symbolic of the message of global salvation offered by the birth of Christ. In these depictions, the 'African' magus Balthazar would often be depicted as black (Hall 1979: 6).

> seen of purely South African subject matter executed as mural decorations, and though I have heard Mr. Juta lecture, and stress the value of our historical background as subject matter, I had no idea of the magnitude of his imagination and his enterprise until I saw his pictures … Have we any other artist equal to this task? It is to be hoped that Pretoria will be cognizant of the fact that one of our sons is capable of this achievement, and that the Union will not fail to claim her rightful own, in our world of art (AAD/1993/9).

More than just responding to (by now largely invisible) aesthetic qualities of the paintings, it seems as if these contemporary commentators, like the others I have quoted in these chapters, are responding to the optimism of the imaginary that they construct. Certainly, in examining them I am struck by the similarities of much of the rhetoric of fusion politics with the rhetoric of nation building in the 'new' South Africa. Consider the 'Programme of Principles' of the United Nationalist South African Party, published in 1934:

> Its object is the development of a predominant sense of South African national unity, based on the equality of the Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking sections of the community, coupled with the recognition and appreciation by either section of the distinctive cultural inheritance of the other (*cit*. Le May 1996: 171).

With the substitution of a few words, this statement would slide very comfortably into the rhetoric of '*ubuntu'*, and its attempts, as an instrument of nation building, to acknowledge and tolerate cultural difference without representing it as Other (Crampton, 2001: 243). (In fact, Smuts's philosophy of holism, which he concisely defined as, "in this universe we are all members of another" (*cit.* Giliomee, 2003: 394) and which informed much of the ideology of fusion politics, bears more than a passing resemblance to the concept of *ubuntu*, and its philosophy of 'I am a person because of other people'.) Although the medium may have changed – the glowing images of the 'Rainbow Nation' associated with this sentiment are now beamed into South African homes via television rather than painted on the walls of public buildings – the inherent message is startlingly similar (these ideas are discussed more fully in Chapter 5).

The decorative programmes of South Africa House and the Pretoria City Hall, then, aesthetically wanting and iconographically problematic as they may be, remind us of the need to preserve a sense of history – no matter how irrelevant or dated its representation – against attempts to erase it. If nothing else, this only goes to show that the construction of identity is never neutral, and that

absolutist constructs of power – and their representation in the visual arts – are never permanent.

Money has been flowing back into the Union. We have almost an embarrassment of it.
– The Editor, *Architect Builder and Engineer* (1933: 1)

CHAPTER FOUR: A tale of three insurers - big business and the politics of South Africanism

South Africa's economy in the 1930s was, as we have seen, driven primarily by two factors: the fusion of Hertzog's Nationalist and Smuts's South African parties, and the abandoning of the gold standard. Indeed, as I have noted in Chapter 2, the former was in many ways contingent on the latter, not least in so far as the rural base on which the survival of Hertzog's party relied was largely destroyed by the crisis precipitated by his initial refusal to abandon the gold standard. This, in addition to the divisive pressures within his party, made a coalition with Smuts inevitable if he, and the moderate Afrikaner interests he represented, were to continue in power.

The installation of the fusion government in 1934 had, as I have discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, a profound impact on the formulation of national identity based on the principles of 'unity in diversity', while also ushering in an era – albeit short-lived – of relative political stability. Jan Smuts, in London both for the opening of South Africa House (see Chapter 2) and as one of three[1] Union delegates to the World Economic Conference, summed up the political mood of the time in an address to the South Africa Club on the 28th June 1933:

> We meet in an atmosphere of goodwill and co-operation, such as South Africa has not known since the far-off days of the National Convention 25 years ago. After a generation of political strife peace has at last been made … already, there has been a surprising change of atmosphere in South Africa. There is fraternising across the front everywhere, there is a blessed sense of release and relief everywhere … one may say without exaggeration that [South Africa] has definitely turned the corner, and is beginning to see daylight (*South Africa*, 1933: 401)

The second factor, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, was the abandoning of the gold standard, which, by devaluing the South African pound in order to bring it to parity with international markets reeling from the effects of the Great

[1] The other delegates were Minister of Finance Claas Havenga and the infamously pro-Fascist Minister of Justice Oswald Pirow.

Depression, not only enabled South African exports to remain viable on world markets, but also had the consequence – ironic in the context of a global recession and a worsening drought – of creating something of an economic boom, with a growth in the GNP, between 1933 and 1938, of 70 per cent (Welsh, 2000: 411). The price of gold rose from £4.25 to £6.23 immediately after the abandoning of the gold standard, to £7.70 in 1939 (Giliomee, 2003: 410), while the increasingly strong manufacturing sector meant that some beneficiation could take place locally, thereby relieving the economy of the "neo-colonial dependency that hobbled so many other mineral-rich countries" (Giliomee, 2003: 410). The combined effect of this relative political stability, increasing economic prosperity, and urbanisation had a profound impact on the development of the idea of a modern South African nation. Particularly in the context of increased urbanisation brought about by the shift in South Africa's economic fortunes, corporate capitalism had a significant part to play – especially in terms of the economic empowerment of the Afrikaner – in articulating what it meant to be South African.

This chapter considers the ways in which the decorative programmes of three Cape Town corporate headquarters of insurance companies, SANTAM/SANLAM (1932), the Commercial Union Assurance Company (1932), and the Old Mutual (1939) reflect this intersection of political and business interests. I argue that the rhetoric of 'modernity' that becomes the unifying theme in buildings constructed by corporations and speculators on both sides of the linguistic/cultural divide are an expression of the desire of the country's economic and cultural centres to celebrate a mood of self-conscious capitalism. They also serve to bring into sharp relief issues of national belonging where it mattered most – in citizens' pockets.

4.1 'Born out of the *volk* to serve the *volk*': SANTAM, SANLAM and Afrikaner economic empowerment

As I have noted in Chapters 1 and 2, urbanisation was one of the most significant and salient aspects of the changing political and economic scene in South Africa in the 1930s. For the most part, commercial activities outside the agricultural sector were still dominated by individuals of British or Jewish descent (Giliomee, 2003: 405). The steadily increasing influx of rural Afrikaners and blacks – impoverished by a prolonged drought and the fallout from the global economic

crisis – into principle metropolitan areas was beginning, however, gradually to alter the scale and ethos of the South African commercial and industrial sectors.

The creation of the state-sponsored Iron and Steel Corporation (ISCOR) in 1933, as well as expansion in the industrial sector in general, created half a million new jobs between 1932 and 1939 (Welsh, 2000: 411). Although a fair proportion of these jobs were non-white, the government's 'civilised labour' policy meant that the increasing numbers of poor whites, generally from impoverished Afrikaner rural communities, were employed in the same kinds of unskilled jobs at wages that could maintain "the standard generally recognised as tolerable from the European standpoint" (*cit*. Giliomee, 2003: 341). 'Uncivilised' (*i.e*. black) labour, on the other hand, was paid only what was considered commensurate with the necessities of "barbarous and underdeveloped peoples" (*cit*. Giliomee, 2003: 341). Driven as much by the need to service burgeoning industry as by nationalist ideological imperatives to create an economically viable Afrikaner middle class in order to solve the 'poor white problem', the economic empowerment of the Afrikaner was therefore becoming a significant socio-political force, particularly if the values of 'civilisation' were to be upheld.

The entry of Afrikaners into the business sector had in fact begun to take place in the wake of the 1914 – 15 rebellion,[2] and the consequent establishment of the *Helpmekaar Vereniging* (Mutual Aid Association), which was established to assist the rebels in paying the civil claims instituted against them by the victims of the uprising.[3] This Association was promoted by prominent Afrikaners, not least the lawyer W. A. (Willie) Hofmeyr, founder, managing director, and first chairman of *Die Nasionale Pers* (1914), which published the Afrikaans newspaper *De Burger* (from its inception in 1916 the mouthpiece of Afrikaner nationalism). Hofmeyr was also the founder and organising secretary of the Cape National Party (1915), where he was instrumental in promoting D. F. Malan's leadership. Given this political clout, the *Helpmekaar Vereniging* achieved two things in a short time. First, it succeeded by 1917 in raising sufficient funds to pay all the fines and civil claims incurred by the rebels. Second, and perhaps more significantly, it

[2] The South African government's declaration of war against Germany in 1914 resulted in an armed rebellion by many Afrikaners. The rebellion degenerated, in some parts, into an orgy of looting, which resulted in a number of civil claims being brought against the rebels by victims. The government's harsh suppression of this revolt spurred Afrikaner sentiment in the direction of an increasingly militant nationalist movement (O'Meara, 1983: 96).

[3] See O'Meara (1983: 97 – 8) and Giliomee (2003: 386 – 7) for a fuller account of the *Helpmekaar Vereniging*.

demonstrated the possibility of the economic empowerment of the Afrikaner through the pooling of resources. In addition to the creation *De Burger*, the *Arme Blanke Verbond* (Poor White Alliance), an organisation that assisted poor whites in finding work, in 1917, and *Ons Eerste Volksbank* (Our First People's Bank) in 1918 bear testimony to this (Davenport, 1991: 290). As Hofmeyr's biographer, N. J. le Roux, put it in 1953,

> The *Helpmekaar* movement was the first to show what the Afrikaner could do if he stood together, if his strength was mustered. … [T]he *Helpmekaar* gave rise to the mighty clarion call to the volk to try to conquer the last stronghold, the business world (le Roux, 1953, *cit.* O'Meara, 1983: 98).

The enterprising Hofmeyr was quick to respond to this 'clarion call'. In 1918 he formed an insurance company dealing in both life and short-term insurance, the *Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Trust Maatskappy*, or SANTAM (the South African National Trust Company), with capital raised from the same Western Cape farmers who had financed *De Burger* (O'Meara, 1983: 98). In the same year, the life insurance operation was separated into a wholly owned subsidiary, the *Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Lewens Assuransie Maatskappy*, or SANLAM (the South African National Life Assurance Company). These companies aimed to increase the productive capital available to its predominantly Cape Afrikaner, pro-Nationalist Party client base[4] by pooling their resources in a central fund; a co-operative principle that was directly influenced by the success of the *Helpmekaar Vereniging*, and which would later also inform the establishment of *Volkskas*, the 'people's bank', in 1934.

The galvanising factor for accessing these resources was through an appeal to nationalist sentiment. "Sanlam is an authentic institution of the Afrikaner *volk* in the widest sense of the word," wrote the company's financial strategist M. S. Louw in the 1921 chairman's report.

> As an Afrikaner, you will naturally give preference to an Afrikaner institution. … If we want to become economically self-reliant then we must support our own institutions. … The fund is composed of Afrikaner capital and control of the capital ought to be in the hands of Afrikaners, to be employed in the service of developing our country (*cit*. O'Meara 1983: 98 – 9).

This attitude was summed up in the company's motto: 'Born out of the *volk* to serve the *volk'* (figure 80). For the time being, however, the Afrikaner's foray into

[4] Despite having all documents in both official languages, attempts at appointing directors aligned with the ruling South African Party failed. Furthermore, although the companies aimed at a national presence, their influence was confined largely to the Cape (Giliomee, 2003: 387).

the English and Jewish dominated world of private business was to remain "slow and unspectacular" (Giliomee, 2003: 388). Nonetheless, the pervasive stereotype of the Afrikaner as a farmer with no taste or aptitude for business – what E. P. du Plessis, the FAK's official historian, described in 1964 as the notion that "the Afrikaner is no businessman and could accomplish nothing in the business world" (*cit*. O'Meara, 1983: 98) – was for the first time seriously challenged. Moreover, the concept of *volkskapitalisme* – the drive to make Afrikaners masters of their own economic destiny by taking control of South African capitalism – that was born out of this incestuous relationship between these new Afrikaner businesses and the National Party, was to have the far-reaching effect of strengthening and consolidating Afrikaner nationalism.

Implicit in the agenda of *volkskapitalisme* was the construction of a new identity for the Afrikaner; one that simultaneously recognised the ties with the land that had always been such a powerful galvanising factor in mobilising Afrikaner nationalism, and the notion that such ties need not preclude access to the burgeoning industrial sphere. Indeed, it was widely recognised that if Afrikaner nationalism were to succeed, the latter was an essential tactic. Nonetheless, as O'Meara points out, the most significant financial contributors to SANTAM and SANLAM remained the Afrikaner farmers in the Cape, a region in which the agricultural sector experienced significant growth between 1918 and 1937 (O'Meara, 1983: 99). This growth was largely sustained by the agricultural co-operative movement that grew out of the Cooperative Association Act of 1922 that, following the principle of the collective funds that were formed in the wake of the *Helpmekaar Vereniging*, enabled more farmers to become economically viable by reducing costs through collective purchasing and the provision of services (O'Meara, 1983: 99). Chief amongst these, for example, was the powerful wine growers' co-operative, the *Ko-operatiewe Wynbouers-Vereniging*, or KWV, established in the same year as the new insurance companies. However, given that the rates of return on agricultural capital are subject, as O'Meara (1983: 100) points out, to the vagaries of seasonal production and consequently to uncertain profitability, SANTAM/SANLAM's growth was slow, and for the best part of the 1930s its sphere of economic influence was confined largely to the Cape. This somewhat undermined the implied universalism of its claims to being an 'authentic institution of the Afrikaner *volk'*. Nonetheless, the existence of a

small but powerful and politically experienced group of Afrikaner capitalists in the Cape demonstrated clearly how a pooling of resources, when combined with political will, could transform perceptions of what it meant to be an Afrikaner. Moreover, in the heady climate of 1930s nationalism, perception increasingly had to be promoted as reality.

4.2 'Suiwer *Afrikaanse motiewe*': SANTAM's corporate headquarters (1932)

The construction of the SANTAM/SANLAM corporate headquarters in Cape Town, completed in 1932, provided just such a moment. For the first two years of its existence, the company had occupied three floors of rented accommodation in Burg Street in Cape Town. In 1918 the fledgling company, eager to expand its market share and despite its meagre resources, audaciously outbid the Johannesburg business mogul I. W. Schlesinger to acquire the African Homes Trust and Assurance Company,[5] through which it purchased, early in 1920, a building at a considerably smarter address on the corner of Adderley and Longmarket Streets (Scannell, 1968: 35). Despite various financial vicissitudes during the 1920s[6] the board recognised the need, increasingly important if the jingoistic appeal to nationalistic sentiment was going to be heeded by its customer base, of a flagship headquarters that would provide physical evidence for the claims it was making of financial stability and commitment to the well-being of the *volk*.[7]

In November 1929, the Board thus approved the acquisition of the premises of the printers of the nationalistic tract, *Ons Land*, on the corner of Wale and Burg Streets. In short order plans were procured from the Cape Town architect Wynand Louw,[8] the existing building was demolished in 1930, construction

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[5] The African Homes Trust (AHT) was established in Cape Town in 1889, initially to assist lower income earners to acquire property by issuing life insurance policies against which policy holders could later borrow money from the company in order to purchase or build property. By 1918, however, the AHT's client base was predominantly industrial, and the SANTAM entrepreneurs saw their chance to expand into this market, while at the same time preventing another 'Hoggenheimer' monopoly on Schlesinger's part. The latter wanted to consolidate his own interests in this area by acquiring AHT, but was outclassed by SANTAM who agreed to allow AHT to continue as a wholly-owned subsidiary.

[6] Not least near bankruptcy after the liquidation of the Free State Board of Executors in which 60 per cent of the company's capital was invested (O'Meara, 1983: 98).

[7] The company's first venture, under its own auspices, into fixed property was a modest building in Bloemfontein, acquired in 1923 (Scannell, 1968: 26). This, however, did not really mitigate the need for a dedicated building in the heart of its economic stronghold, the Cape.

[8] Wynand Hendrik Louw (b. Labori et Picardi, Suider Paarl, 1883; d. Paarl, Cape Town, Aug 1967)

commenced at the beginning of 1931, and the company took occupation of its new headquarters in September 1932 (Scannell, 1968: 35). L. Cumming-George (1933: 94), in the first volume of his *Architecture in South Africa* published a year later, summed up the situation. He describes how "the affiliated insurance companies SANLAM and SANTAM have been growing so rapidly even in these times of depression that they were compelled to have a new building erected, the old building in Adderley Street having been outgrown." To all outward appearances at least *volkskapitalisme* now had attained, in less than a decade, literally and figuratively a concrete identity.

Wynand Louw had certainly risen to the challenge of producing a landmark building (figure 73). "*Kaapstad kry 'n pronkgebou* (Cape Town gets a building to boast with)*"* crowed *Die Huisgenoot* (the domestic cog in the Nasionale Pers propaganda machine) characterised by "taut lines and modernistic simplicity" (*strakke lyne and modernistiese eenvoud*)" (*Die Huisgenoot*, 1932: 47, my translation). The company's official brochure produced for the occasion described it as "a poetic building in which beauty and decoration are united with function" (*'n Digterlike bouwerk waarin skoonheid en sierlikheid met bruikbaarheid verenig is*) (*cit*. Scannell, 1968: 36). Not to be outdone, the editor of the *African Insurance Record* praised it as "an epitome of the progress of our country" (*cit*. Scannell, 1968: 37). The theme of progress and modernity informing this rhetoric was of course an essential ingredient in establishing a new identity for the Afrikaner; no longer confined, either literally or metaphorically, to the rural margins of the city and its riches, and capable of taking up his[9] rightful place in the fast-paced world

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is recognised as the first privately practising Afrikaans architect in South Africa, although he, unlike his associate Gerard Moerdijk, was not assertive politically. He trained under J. C. E. Seeliger in Cape Town and at the Architectural Association in London. After returning from London in 1907, he returned to his hometown of Paarl to set up practice.

[9] I use the pronoun, here and elsewhere, advisedly. The Afrikaner Broederbond, the secret society devoted to the advancement of '*ware*' Afrikaners ('true' Afrikaners, *i.e.* without any taint of English blood), was established in 1919, hot on the heels of the success of the *Helpmekaar Vereniging* and the establishment of SANLAM. By means of an increasingly powerful network of members throughout all levels of teaching, the professions, and government (in fact all the South African leaders between Jan Smuts and Nelson Mandela were members (Welsh, 2000: 412)), the *Broeders* – invariably white, male, and conservative – came to dominate every aspect of public life in Nationalist Party South Africa. It goes almost without saying that the key drivers behind SANLAM and the Nasionale Pers were all members. In the 1930s, the scope of the *Bond*'s activities was further promoted by the establishment in 1929 of its cultural arm, the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (FAK). In addition to the promotion of the Afrikaner language and culture, this organisation also provided for the economic needs of Afrikaners during the Depression through the creation of co-operative institutions such as *Volkskas* and the *Uniewinkels*, and the organisation of conferences to deal with economic issues affecting Afrikaners. The latter culminated in the *Ekonomiese Volkskongres* in 1939 (Davenport, 1991: 290).

of international commerce. The natural corollary of participation in the global economy – political power – was of course a given. Louw's building had to take cognisance of these aspirations, while at the same time appealing to the powerful sentiments of nationalism then being promoted, as I have shown in Chapter 3, in terms of historical ties to the land.

Indeed, for the writer of the official brochure (*cit*. Scannell, 1968: 36) the company's very existence was "inspired by the spirit of the Voortrekkers," and accordingly

> the pioneers of SANTAM and SANLAM set themselves the gigantic task of bringing into being two great peoples' financial institutions [*finansiële volksintellinge*] … Failure simply did not exist for these progressive and courageous leaders; and today their new home stands as a symbol of their immovable faith and elevated ideals … The spirit of the Voortrekkers triumphed (my translation).[10]

The editor of the *African Insurance Record* stated a little more boldly the paradigmatic shift that the building and its owners represented, bringing into sharp relief not only contemporary attitudes amongst the broader business community regarding the status of Afrikaners, but also the extent to which nascent *volkskapitalisme* was beginning to challenge these assumptions:

> With South Africans – and especially with those descendants of the original Dutch inhabitants – we associate slow bullock wagons, obsolete farming methods, respectable if prejudiced conservatism, and the bowing down to the inexorable laws of Nature with no hope of rescue from the discoveries of science … What a disillusionment is here. A great and growing institution, founded, it is true, on the traditional conservatism of the race, but pursued with a force and carried out with a regard for the latest inventions of science and all the most up-to-date systems of commercial progress (*cit*. Scannell, 1968: 37).

The building was thus not so much a symbol of the Voortrekker-inspired 'immovable faith and elevated ideals' of its owners, as it was (to paraphrase Nico Coetzee (1992) on the subject of Pierneef's station panels) an invitation, a promise, and a challenge: an invitation to Afrikaners everywhere (the company's client base was still predominantly confined to the Cape) to invest their money in an institution that was forward-thinking and sufficiently financially sound to afford such an up-to-date and well-appointed structure; a promise that the historical roots of Afrikaner identity would be neither ignored nor supplanted by

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[10] *Besiel met die gees van die Voortrekkers, het die baanbrekers van Santam en Sanlam hulle die reuse taak gestel om twee groot finansiële volksinstellinge tot stand te bring … Vir hierdie vooruitstrewende en moedige leiers het mislukking egter nie bestaan nie; en vandag staan hul nuwe tuiste as sinnebeeld van hul onwrikbare vertroue en verhewe ideale … Die gees van die Voortrekkers het geseëvier.*

the necessarily relentless march of progress; and a challenge to entrenched British and Jewish capitalism that the *volk* would no longer countenance being third-class economic citizens.

The third of these effects is largely the sum of the previous two, both of which are engaged abundantly both in terms of the structure *per se* and the decorative programme of its façade. The most salient characteristic of the new building, recognised, as we have seen, by contemporary commentators, was its 'modernity'. Although only a modest six storeys high, it conveys the impression of a much taller building; in effect, a New York-style skyscraper in miniature. The cast sandstone structure, erected on a base of pinkish granite, rises sheer from the street, its impression of dominant verticality reinforced by the treatment of a series of narrow bays, which terminate in stepped arches. The spandrels in these bays are decorated with pre-cast cement panels that repeat across both the Wale and Burg Street elevations (figure 74), the pale blue background of the topmost panels contrasting powerfully with the dominant greyness of the cast sandstone of the façade (figure 75). The dominant sense of verticality indeed combines with the regular rhythm established by the band of unadorned windows to establish a sense of 'modernistic' simplicity; a façade and structure uncluttered by the fussy accoutrements of classicism then favoured by established (that is, British) financial institutions.[11] Furthermore, such decoration as did appear on the building's façade resonated strongly with the company's desire to promote a new image for the Afrikaner, one that took cognisance of his/her emotional and spiritual ties with the land, but balanced with an awareness of the modern age.

If the structure unequivocally expresses 'modernity', the necessary balance between modernity and tradition is expressed in the decorative panels. These panels were sculpted by a Miss M. Quail,[12] ostensibly in the service of "symbolising the work of the firms that are housed in the building (*om die werk van die firmas wat in die gebou gehuisves is, te versinnebeeld*)" (*Die Huisgenoot*, 1932: 47, my translation). In the arches at the top of the bays are allegorical representations of 'Trust', 'Care' (*Versorging*), and 'Fruitfulness' (*Die Vrug*),

[11] Classical revivalism still remained the officially sanctioned style in Cape Town in the early 1930s, particularly amongst financial institutions. For example, Black and Fagg's Standard Bank 'ABC' Branch (1930) and James Morris's South African Reserve Bank (1929) buildings, both of which self-consciously evoke the style and iconography of Renaissance classicism, were awarded the Architectural Institute's bronze medals in 1931 and 1932 respectively.

[12] I have unfortunately been unable to find any other references to this artist.

clearly attributes that the company was keen for its current and potential clients to associate with it. 'Trust' shows a female figure garbed in robes – as befits her allegorical status – kneeling before a stern, bearded patriarch to whom she entrusts her money (figure 76). 'Fruitfulness' shows the robed female figure sporting a cornucopia (figure 77), while 'Care' has her in the *Vénus Anadyomène* pose watering a plant from an amphora over her shoulder (figure 78). These panels, like the ones that repeat regularly lower down on the façade, are pre-cast, and appear in the same grouping (Trust, Fruitfulness, Care) across all the bays. Unlike the monochrome cement panels lower down, however, these panels are of coloured faïence, and – reminiscent of the designs on a Wedgwood plate – show white figures on a blue ground. Thus, an incipient reference to the classical tradition favoured by the architects of the British financial establishment – largely for its embedded notions of permanence, authority, and civilisation – is retained, but expressed nonetheless in terms of the vernacular.

For *Die Huisgenoot* the matter was simple: this blue ground clearly suggested "the blue of the African sky (*die blou van die Afrikaanse hemel*)" (*Die Huisgenoot*, 1932: 47, my translation). Furthermore, these allegorical figures – not least the kneeling female entrusting her money to the bearded patriarch – might also be interpreted in terms of the notions of the 'civil religion' that was so much part of the drive towards defining Afrikaner identity during this period (this is discussed more fully in Chapter 3 in relation to Jan Juta's panels in the Pretoria City Hall). In these terms these figures, set in niches like mediaeval saints and against the blue of the firmament, serve to define the building as a 'cathedral of commerce'. Viewed thus, these images certainly corroborate O'Meara's observation that the 'civil religion' of the Afrikaner was essentially a device for the concentration of diverse interests on a common materialist purpose, *volkskapitalisme* (O'Meara, 1983).

The lower panels are somewhat more prosaic in terms of their subject matter, but nonetheless have a bearing on the issues identified above. Set in the spandrels in the bays below the allegorical figures, they depict 'Industry', with male workers operating machinery; 'Sport', with rugby players in action; 'Export', with workers handling heavy cargo in front of a ship (in contrast to the white workers depicted in the 'industry' panel, these workers are black); and, of course, 'Agriculture', with a male figure driving an ox-drawn plough (figure 79).

Interestingly, it is the latter that was chosen, along with a drawing of the 'skyscraper,' to illustrate the company's advertisement in *Die Huisgenoot* in the early 1930s (figure 80). In this way the company could be seen to engage both the conservative as well as the progressive factions of its constituency by appealing both to those who wanted to see the Afrikaner take his 'rightful place' in the fast-paced world of commerce, as well as those whose political and cultural identity was irrevocably linked with the land. These panels repeat randomly across both the Wale and Burg Street elevations, and are relieved by a panel showing birds in flight over the ocean (figure 81), a symbolic representation of 'prosperity' (*Die Huisgenoot*, 1932: 47).

Thus is constructed an image of a prosperous and progressive community, supported in equal measure by industry and agriculture, and united by a love of sport. These panels seem to imply that, more than merely an insurance company, SANTAM/SANLAM is a benign benefactor; an integral and essential part of the *volk*. Its location in the Mother City, with a "beautiful view of Table Mountain (*'n pragtige gesig op Tafelberg*)" (*cit.* Scannell 1968: 36, my translation) and with whose granite slopes its monumental concrete shape was clearly in sympathy, must also have contributed significantly to its symbolic and cultural importance. As O'Meara (1983: 101) puts it,

> [SANTAM and SANLAM] were born out of, as an integral part of, the nationalist movement at the Cape. Santam and Sanlam [*sic*] were as much part of Cape Afrikaner nationalism as the party and its press … Moreover, the Cape Party, Die Nasionale Pers and Santam and Sanlam [*sic*] had all been formed, and were fundamentally sustained by an economic and political alliance between Western Cape capitalist farmers and the group of professional men around Hofmeyr. This alliance constituted the foundation on which the political and financial institutions of the Cape nationalist movement were built.

It is clearly to this increasingly powerful alliance that these images speak, not least in their careful pairing of 'industry' and 'agriculture' and references to the agricultural export industry that was such an integral part of the Western Cape's – and the country's – small but growing economy.

The building's claim to a national, 'African' identity is expressed unequivocally in the series of low relief bronze panels at first floor level on the Burg Street elevation (figure 82). Stylised representations of indigenous fauna and flora (figures 83, 84, and 85) are interspersed with images of 'ethnic' blacks, Zulu

warriors (figure 86) and Bushmen (figure 87). *Die Huisgenoot* (1932: 47, my translation) described these as

> pure African [*Afrikaanse*] motifs which express the African [*Afrikaanse*] character of the firms. Bushmen with knobkerries and charging Kaffirs with rawhide shields and assegais, cactus plants, bunches of grapes, proteas, ostriches *etc.*, are stunningly represented[13] (my translation).

The references to the indigenous African context are extended to the ceiling of the vestibule, the coffers of which – dispensing with the pinecones of classical convention – are decorated with giant protea buds (figure 88). The lavish use of colour in the interior of the building, particularly in the ceiling of the ground floor offices, further reinforced, according *Die Huisgenoot*, the building's uniquely 'African' character. In sharp contrast to the "greyness of the northern countries under whose influence our architecture stands (*die grouheid van die noordelike lande onder wie se invloed ons boukuns staan*)", these bright colours

> agree with the character of the building, with the wealth of luxuriantly coloured flowers and clear blue skies of our sunny South Africa [*strook met die karakter van die gebou, met ons sonnige Suid-Afrika se weelde van blomkleure en sy helderblou hemel*]" (*Die Huisgenoot*, 1932: 47, my translation).

The green marble cladding of the interior pillars was quarried outside Pretoria, and displays "the masterful hand of nature (*die meesterhand van die natuur*)", while the parquet floors were of kiaat from central Africa (*Die Huisgenoot*, 1932: 47).

The building thus enters into a discourse of 'belonging' by claiming a direct link with the land. The use of indigenous materials and imagery implies, in much the same way as the classical orders did for the British establishment, a sense of permanence and inevitability, but with the added advantage of being located in a temporal and geographical present. In effect, this is not unlike Herbert Baker's use of indigenous materials and motifs in South Africa House. But whereas for Baker such materials and imagery resonated, as I have shown in Chapter 2, somewhat remotely with notions of the 'romance' of South Africa, for Louw and the ideologues of SANTAM and SANLAM they express an unequivocal sense of *genius loci*. They make a claim, in effect, for the authenticity of the Afrikaner's uniquely 'African' origins, and his inalienable right to its bounty. In this context

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[13] *[S]uiwer Afrikaanse motiewe wat uitdrukking gee aan die Afrikaanse karakter van die firmas. Boesmans met knopkieries en aanstormende Kaffers met skildvel en asgaai, kaktusplante, trosse druiwe, proteas, volstruise, ens., is treffend daarop uitgebeeld.*

the adjective '*Afrikaans'* may thus well assume the double meaning both of 'African' and 'Afrikaner', reinforced by the choice of the imagery of 'ethnic' blacks. On the one hand the implied conflation of African and Afrikaner that this implies clearly asserts a sense of a shared indigenousness, while on the other it still presents them as 'other' and exotic; as much of the earth as the plants and animals with whom they share their frozen tableau. In this way, an 'African' identity is asserted for the Afrikaner, while still leaving no doubt about his racial and moral superiority. Once again, one is reminded of the growing interest amongst Afrikaner intellectuals (particularly at the University of Stellenbosch) in *volkekunde* (see Chapter 2). In the context of the 1930s the political dimension of *volkekunde* was, as John Sharp (extrapolating from Dan O'Meara) shows (Sharp, 1981: 28), already apparent, and bound up with the economic imperatives of Afrikaner nationalism. To counter the threat of the proletarianisation of poor white Afrikaners, he argues,

> Afrikaans intellectuals sought consciously to further the articulation of a volkish dogma, seeking through various avenues to mobilise an alliance, to be expressed in ethnic terms, in opposition to the existing structure of South African capitalism.

Viewed thus, these images of blacks are as much about asserting an authentically African identity as they are about assigning ethnicity its 'rightful place': black Africans frozen in perpetuity in the stultifying *ethnos* of tribalism, while the white Afrikaner, by virtue of his superior *ethnos*, can aspire to the world of modernity and commerce.

The combination of the 'uniquely' African with the clean-limned 'modernity' of the structure proved a powerful combination. For the writer of the company brochure these things clearly signified the building's '*Afrikaanse'* character:

> In this way [the building] reflects in a suitable way not only the spirit and aspirations of the company, but also the most salient characteristic of the *volk* and the land. The beauty of simplicity and the simplicity of beauty, with the big blue planes and taut lines, the shades in the colours of the material, from dark grey to the crenels that rise against the heavens, bind together so beautifully the vast fields of the country, the height of the mountains, the greyness of the earth and the blueness of the sky[14] (*cit.* Scannell, 1968: 36, my translation).

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[14] *Daarby weerspieël dit op gepaste wyse nie alleen die gees en strewe van die maatskappy nie, maar ook die hoofkenmerk van die volk en die land. Die skoonheid van eenvoud en die eenvoud van skoonheid, met die groot blou vlakke en strakke lyne, die skakering in die kleur van die materiaal van donkergrys teen die kantele wat ten hemel styg, bind die uitgestrekte velde van die land, die hoogte van die berge, die grysheid van die aarde en die blouheid van die lug so pragtig saam.*

Die Huisgenoot reiterated this sense of the building's claim to a sense of *genius loci*, achieved primarily through "taut simplicity [*strakke eenvoud*], spaciousness, solidity and elegance."

> It is, in particular, in its simplicity, in the absence of excessive flourishes, that the African [*Afrikaanse*] character, united with the modernistic decorative motifs, is expressed so faithfully and strikingly[15] (*Die Huisgenoot*, 1932: 47, my translation).

In effect, what Louw seemed to achieve – if these contemporary responses are any indication of its broader affect – are two of the signal acts Lawrence Vale (1999: 396) describes as characteristic of any attempt at establishing a sense of national identity in architectural terms: namely, the need to "re-assert the sub-national identity of the sponsoring regime by equating its own specific ethnic heritage with 'the national'", and the need to extend this identity into an international context by means of some sort of "noteworthy modernity." These were particularly important in the context of *volkskapitalisme*, in so far, as we have seen, as that ideology had to overturn powerful stereotypes, pervasive amongst the British establishment, that characterised the Afrikaner as backward and lacking in the attributes necessary for survival in the world of modern commerce.

Indeed, this sense of a 'noteworthy modernity' – and in particular in the extent to which it is communicated through architectural projects – was to become significant in terms of the future trajectory of Afrikaner nationalism. After 1948, the nationalist government (and its close associates in the commercial sector[16]) embraced the steel, glass, and reinforced concrete brutalism of the post-Second World War international style with a fervour that bordered on the messianic. From monolithic civic centres to curiously brutalistic theatre complexes and towering office blocks, the overwhelming – if often inappropriate – message was of a government that had 'arrived,' and whose claims to progress and modernity were unassailable. Louw's SANTAM/SANLAM building is the first in this

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[15] *Dit is juis in sy eenvoud, in die afwesigheid van oorbodige tierlantyntjies dat die Afrikaanse karakter, verenig met die modernistiese versieringsmotiewe, so getrou en treffend uitgedruk word.*

[16] See Silverman (2000) for a discussion of the architecture of Volkskas Bank, and particularly the extent to which post-Second World War modernism was used to promote the bank's identity.

lineage, and assured him a prime position in the South African architectural establishment as something of a *volksargitek*.[17]

It is interesting – and, in retrospect, significant – that these claims to a 'noteworthy modernity' and the construction of an 'African' ethnicity in the construction of Afrikaner nationalism are first made in commercial terms. If the Afrikaner is going to be taken seriously in the 'modern' world of commerce, the buildings seemed to signify, he has to show that he is more than able to live up to the required image. This point was not lost on *Die Huisgenoot* (1932: 47, my translation). "This building," it concluded, "is an ornament for the Mother City and serves as a sign of the progress of the Afrikaner in the business world … we hope that it will serve to inspire other Afrikaners involved in the business world."[18]

It certainly seemed to do the trick for SANTAM/SANLAM. The company initially occupied only the ground and first floors and a portion of the second, allowing the remaining "well-lit and adequately ventilated offices [to be] let to the public" (Cumming-George, 1933: 94) (and thus, no doubt, recoup some of the considerable expense involved in its construction). However, the company's rapid expansion meant that the building had to be enlarged twice shortly after its completion, first in 1935 and again in 1941. Thanks to Louw's modular design, these extensions were carried out without any change to the façade or its decorative programme. SANLAM continued to occupy the building until 1953, and sold it to the African Homes Trust in 1962 when it moved to a purpose-built international style skyscraper on the Cape Town foreshore. This building, reminding us of its roots in *volkskapitalisme*, is currently occupied by the publishing company Naspers, the latter-day incarnation of *Die Nasionale Pers*.

4.3 'Modernism *in excelsis*': the Commercial Union building (1932) and British capitalist hegemony

The SANTAM/SANLAM building was clearly more than a corporate headquarters; it was also an important essay in capitalistic nationalism, and thus, I would argue, assumes a symbolic status way beyond its literal functions.

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[17] Riding the wave of optimism generated by the new headquarters and in an attempt to increase its presence in the north, the company bought its first building in Johannesburg in September 1933 (Scannell, 1968: 37).

[18] *Hierdie bouwerk is 'n sieraad vir die Moederstad en dien as 'n teken van die vooruitgang van die Afrikaner in die sakewêreld … wat, na ons hoop, ook ander Afrikaners wat in die sakewêreld betrokke is, tot besieling sal dien.*

Its modernity, as I have shown, was an essential component of this ideological posturing: a way of announcing its arrival at the forefront of contemporary commerce. Its location in the Cape served to promote further the political credibility of the Cape National Party (which, under the leadership of D. F. Malan and with the background machinations of the *Broederbond*, was directing its energies towards unseating Hertzog and pursuing its goal of republicanism (O'Meara, 1983; Davenport, 1991)). It also struck a blow for *volkskapitalisme* in the heartland of British imperialist capitalism: the Cape's financial sector – as, indeed, the rest of the country's – had been dominated by British owned or controlled companies virtually since the second occupation in 1806 (Simons, 1995). However, while this building certainly made a decisive break with existing stylistic conventions and in so doing opened up a new range of iconographic possibilities, it was not unique in this. The Commercial Union building (figure 89), also opened in September 1932 and situated a few blocks away on Greenmarket Square, is a case in point. A comparison of these two buildings – exact contemporaries, both built for insurance companies, and both surprisingly and self consciously 'modern' in their effect – serves further to illuminate the extent of the ideological posturing of *volkskapitalisme* and its construction of a 'modern African' identity within the imperialist heartland of Cape Town.

The British-owned Commercial Union Assurance Company selected as the architect for their Cape Town headquarters the prominent expatriate Scot, William Hood Grant.[19] Since Grant had first set up practice in partnership with McGillivray in Cape Town in 1903 (the partnership was dissolved in 1923), he had gained a reputation for producing fashionably elegant and well appointed buildings for his corporate clients. These included the insurance companies Norwich Life[20] and General Assurance, for whom he designed headquarters in 1906 and 1928 respectively. By 1930 he had evolved a characteristic style, at once entirely derivative of the prevailing 'Cape Mediterranean'-inspired classicism espoused by the Baker school (see Chapters 1 and 2), but tempered with a number of vigorous stylistic refinements, which were increasingly

[19] William Hood Grant, b. Dundee, Scotland 1879, d. Hermanus, South Africa 1957. See Freschi, 1998 and 2004 for a fuller discussion of Grant's background and early work in Cape Town.
[20] The Norwich Union building had the distinction of being the first building to be erected and owned by the Norwich Union outside of the United Kingdom (Rosenthal, 1973: 65).

synthesised into the elaborate 'modernism' of his 1930s style. Given that the tide of architectural taste was, as I have shown in Chapter 1, beginning to turn by the end of the 1920s, the Commercial Union project provided an opportunity at the start of the new decade for him to consolidate these refinements.

The result was an imposing structure that was significant primarily for two reasons. First, an elaborate ten storeys from the ground to the topmost parapet, it was for a short time the tallest building in Cape Town's central business district, and thus, as I have shown in Chapter 1, a harbinger of a new kind of urban self consciousness that was to change profoundly the scale and conception of subsequent urban architecture. While the notion of Johannesburg as a 'modern metropolis' had, as I have discussed in Chapter 1, already become entrenched in the popular imagination, the presence of two new 'skyscrapers' being erected simultaneously in Cape Town sounded a tocsin note for the pervasive notion of Cape Town as a colonial outpost with an extended village-like character. Second, it marked a decisive break with historical revivalism as the *sine qua non* of corporate architecture, and in so doing engaged a rhetoric of modernity that replaced received notions of respectability and historicism with novelty and contemporaneity as key drivers in establishing corporate identity. For a firm whose venerable presence in the Cape dated back to 1863, this was indeed something of a paradigm shift.

Remarking on the building's startling appearance, the *South African Builder* (September 1932: 3) opined that with this building "modernism in design almost 'in excelsis' has come to Cape Town", and went on to comment that

> [s]ome other buildings recently erected in the Mother City in the modern manner [this may well be a reference to the SANTAM/SANLAM building] show less restraint than that under notice, which has the distinction of being fresh and non-imitative.

A later issue praised its "stately appearance" and "very modern character" (February, 1933: 21), while Cumming-George (1933: 97), in his contemporary *Architecture in South Africa* reiterates this sentiment, describing the building as "the latest of Cape Town's imposing modern buildings" with "fine decorative modern stonework." Certainly, nowhere on the elaborate façade, which is lavishly and uniformly decorated on the Greenmarket Square, Shortmarket and St. George's Street elevations, is there any reference to the Bakeresque classicism that had dominated the architectural scene of the preceding two decades. Taking its cue from American skyscraper architecture there is, instead,

an intricate and eclectic play of geometric forms – some, like the stepped parapets on the top storeys, reminiscent of Aztec decorative motifs (figure 90) – sharing the façade with figurative elements. These include a continuous band of stylised proteas along its length (figure 91); with equally stylised eagles framing the doorways and flanking the building's corners (figure 92).

The references to the New York skyscraper style are significant as far as they point to the changing perceptions of corporate identity. As primarily a commercial style, the new skyscraper aesthetic that developed in New York and Chicago had embraced, from the mid teens of the twentieth century, a variety of stylistic sources in its attempts to fulfil the requirements of good advertising. In her discussion of the skyscraper style in these cities, Carol Willis (1995: 146) points out that

> [m]ost corporate headquarters also lease a major portion of their buildings to outside tenants … [therefore] … all skyscrapers … can be viewed as real estate ventures, either as income-generating properties or as long-term investments in high-value urban space.

Extrapolating from this it is clear that the external appearance of a commercial building was, then as now, as important as the kind of space it offered in terms of attracting clientele – in short, the more attractive the building, the higher the rental it could command. In these terms, the eclectic novelty of the Commercial Union building's façade must be understood at least partly as a financial strategy designed to increase return on investment, as much as it attests to the progressive and forward-thinking attitude of the corporation. Unlike the SANTAM/SANLAM building, however, which had more of an ideological axe to grind, there is consequently no direct iconographic link between the decorative programme of the façade and the building's function as a corporate headquarters with space to let.

The details are, nonetheless, interesting in themselves. In addition to the seemingly Aztec inspired parapets, there are elaborate medallions, corner mouldings, spandrels, and zigzags (figure 93) that evoke art deco's simultaneous fascination both with the exotic and with the futuristic. The eagles flanking the entrances and corners are more obviously reminiscent of the stylised American eagles that graced contemporary American public works architecture (figure 94), and in which context would clearly have had an overtly nationalistic symbolic status. The continuous band of stylised proteas that link the eagles are iconographically ambiguous: while they might, like the protea buds on the

coffers of the SANTAM/SANLAM building's vestibule, on the one hand serve to anchor the building in its South African context, on the other the structure of the flower lends itself very well to stylisation in this manner.

The architect John Egan[21], who worked as a draughtsman in Grant's offices in the 1930s, provided an insight into the arbitrariness of these choices in an interview (1997): "We both seemed to have similar ideas of detail" he told me, "and [Grant] left a lot of his ideas to me. He did not do any drafting himself … if he sketched out something I would work it up for him."[22] Regarding the origins of the decorative elements themselves, Egan (1997) summed it up quite simply: "Mr. Grant took bits and pieces from various things that appealed to him." These included, according to Egan, details from the American journal *Architectural Forum* to which Grant subscribed, as well as details from the interiors of the ships docked in the harbour. Once the designs were completed, the Salt River Cement Works[23] would cast the mouldings for installation on the façade. "Both [the Salt River and the Union Cement Works] had Italian fellows who [were] artistic and made plaster of Paris templates from our designs."

Although this anecdotal evidence would seem to support the notion that the iconography of the façade is nothing less than gratuitous, its modernistic eclecticism is nonetheless significant. First, the self-consciousness of these 'modern' forms clearly identifies the corporation – as did the 'modern' lines of the SANTAM/SANLAM Building – as progressive, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan. Unlike SANTAM/SANLAM, however, this modernity is not informed by an overtly nationalistic agenda. It is, rather – like all of Grant's buildings in Cape Town[24] – flamboyant, fashionable, and oriented around visual impact: the most salient manifestations of novelty, and grist to the mill of corporate advertising.

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[21] John Edward Egan FRIBA (b. 1906) also worked in F. M. Glennie's offices. He set up his own practice in Cape Town in the early 1950s, in which he continued to work until his retirement in the late 1970s.

[22] Egan (1997) also related how, since Grant was left-handed, they would sometimes work on the same drawing: "On a very large, detailed drawing, he did the lettering on the left side and I on the right."

[23] The Salt River Cement Works was responsible for the manufacture of most of the architectural decorative elements on contemporary buildings in Cape Town, including the SANTAM/SANLAM building (see Cumming-George, 1933 and 1934).

[24] Grant designed a significant number of commercial buildings in Cape Town, including, *inter alia*, The Argus buildings, The Norwich Union Building, the General Assurance Building, Boston House, Shell House, the OK Bazaars Building, as well as a number of theatres for I. W. Schlesinger's African Consolidated Theatres. See Freschi 1998 (2004) for a discussion of Grant's commercial work in Cape Town.

This is not to suggest, however, that Grant's architecture, as exemplified by the Commercial Union Building, stands outside of ideological constructs. Rather, since he was operating from *within* the dominant discourse of British imperialist capitalism, assumptions of cultural dominance were taken entirely for granted. The kind of nationalistic posturing and clumsy tropes of ethnicity and autochthony evidenced by the SANTAM/SANLAM Building therefore would have appeared to his clients at best as bewildering, and at worst as laughable. Moreover, the celebration of capitalism suggested by its flamboyant forms is unencumbered by the moralistic tone of social responsibility and racial superiority that – however expediently – informs the decorative programme of the SANTAM/SANLAM Building. If the SANTAM/SANLAM Building, then, was born ostensibly 'out of the *volk* to serve the *volk'*, the Commercial Union building, by virtue of its flamboyant and self-conscious assertion of modernity – and the implicit associations of grandeur and elevated status – was clearly keeping the flag flying for British capitalist hegemony. As K. O. Kupperman (1980: 2) puts it in the introduction to his discussion of the collision of English and Native American cultures in America, "neither savagery nor race was the important category … The really important category was status".

4.4 'Security by strength through unity': the Old Mutual building (1939) and the politics of South Africanism

Both the SANTAM/SANLAM and the Commercial Union buildings were, of course, substantially under way before the upturn in the South African economy in the wake of the abandoning of the gold standard in December 1931. The fact that they were commissioned at all in the late 1920s – not, after all, a good time for the insurance industry generally – attests to the tenacious drive on the part of their owners to consolidate, in their different ways and for their different reasons, a sense of progressiveness, stability, and modernity. While the stylistic and technological advances that they initiated were to become common currency by the end of the decade, at its start they effectively set a new standard for corporate architecture in Cape Town, and with the economic upturn and political coalition of 1933, other big corporations were increasingly under pressure to revamp their corporate architectural identity. Not least amongst these was the

South African Mutual Life Assurance Society, better known as the Old Mutual[25], the oldest and the biggest of South Africa's insurers and a formidable player in the South African market since it was founded in Cape Town in 1845.

By 1932 the Old Mutual's contribution to the architectural landscape of Cape Town – and indeed in all the towns and cities in which it had a presence (including elsewhere in the African subcontinent, with branches as far north as Nairobi; as we shall see, this would be significant for the decorative programme of the new headquarters) – had not been insignificant. Its first headquarters, a three storeyed structure in a restrained classical style designed by the expatriate Scot James Bisset, was erected in Cape Town in 1864.[26] When this building was destroyed by fire in 1902, a competition, won by the firm Stucke and Harrison, was held for a new one. The company occupied this six-storey structure – in style typically Edwardian classical, with some incipient art nouveau touches (and indeed not unlike Grant's building for Norwich Union completed the same year) – from 1906 until 1933 when the directors approved the construction of a new head office in Cape Town in order to accommodate its ever-increasing staff.

The directors could not fail to be aware, however, of the impressive architectural statements being made by its competitors. At some level the decision to erect "an entirely new building on an entirely new site – a building that would be worthy of the Old Mutual's status as the oldest and largest life assurance society in South Africa" (Simons, 1995: 118) must have been informed by this awareness. The Cape Town architect Fred M. Glennie (who had been associated with the firm since he had designed an additional storey for the Stucke and Harrison building in 1926, as well as buildings in Salisbury, Bloemfontein, De Aar, and Beaufort West throughout the 1920s) was enjoined by the directors early in 1933 to team up with Wynand Louw's firm. Given the

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[25] Established by a group of prominent colonists centred around the figure of John Fairbairn in Cape Town in 1845, the Mutual Life Assurance Society of the Cape of Good Hope, as it was then called, rose to become one of the foremost, widely dispersed corporate bodies in the Southern African region. For more than three decades after its inception, it held a clear monopoly on the life assurance market in the Cape Colony until the appearance in the 1880s of rival insurance companies from Britain and elsewhere (including the Commercial Union). The entry in 1883 into the market of the Colonial Mutual Life Assurance society of South Africa, the South African branch of a Melbourne based Australian company, occasioned the moniker by which the company is still known. According to Philidda Brooke Simons (1995: 65), the South African Mutual Life Assurance Society (as it was renamed with an Act of Incorporation in 1888) then became known as the 'old' Mutual "obviously to differentiate between it and the Colonial – or 'new' – Mutual in the minds and speech of Capetonians."

[26] See Simons (1995) for a discussion of the Old Mutual's various buildings.

implicit politics that governed much of the building and its decorative programme, it would seem that the teaming up of an eminent 'English' firm with the pre-eminent Afrikaner firm in Cape Town was largely a political choice, designed to capitalise on the notions of unity then being brought into sharp relief by the Smuts/Hertzog coalition.

No expense was spared in terms of realising the new structure, which was to be "peerless in every respect: stylistically and aesthetically it was to be both original in concept and impeccable in taste, while from a practical and working point of view it should conform with the highest standards of urban office design" (Simons, 1995: 119). In order to ensure that the architects would be even to the task,

> [the architects] went overseas to check up on the newest modern practice elsewhere, and to acquaint themselves personally with such practical subjects as air-conditioning, fire protection in high buildings, interior illumination, and so on (*The Cape Times*, January, 1940: unnumbered page).

Construction commenced on the building early in 1935, and in January 1940 the company took occupation. By that time, however, South Africa had entered into Britain's war against Germany – thanks to Smuts'ss imperialist sympathies, which prevailed over Hertzog's desire for sympathetic neutrality and which caused the latter to resign from parliament, embattled and embittered (he died in 1942) – and the excitement that might otherwise have characterised the occasion was, consequently, considerably dampened.

Nonetheless, the building certainly outclassed its rivals (figure 95). A special supplement in the *Cape Times* (January, 1940: unnumbered page) described it as "one of the most impressive structures on the whole continent of Africa", while the *Architectural Press* (January, 1940: unnumbered page) gushingly suggested that "this building is, in our opinion, the only one in Cape Town which has the elements of greatness. It is indeed difficult", it continued

> not to be extravagant in the use of adjectives in discussing this structure. It is well planned, finely modelled in its massing, with the magnificent tower standing up and dominating the whole. It has the finest of all materials – granite – in its outer construction, and its components are all handled with care and attention to the results as a whole.

Of primary architectural significance was the fact that the building distinguished itself in terms of height. At 84.1 metres from the ground floor to the top of the tower, it was one of the tallest buildings in the country, and certainly the tallest

in Cape Town. Its nearest national rivals were Escom House in Johannesburg completed in 1937 (and demolished in the 1980s), at 76.2 metres from the ground, and the contemporary Anstey's Building, also in Johannesburg, at 51.8 metres. This extraordinary height (hitherto limited to 36.6 metres, or the ten storeys of the Commercial Union building) was permitted by the municipality only because of the "set-back principle of design, as developed in American skyscraper architecture" (*Cape Times*, 1940: unnumbered page).

At the beginning of the decade, reservations had been expressed about the role of 'skyscrapers' in South Africa's burgeoning cities. As the *Architecture, Builder and Engineer* (December, 1930: 3) put it,

> South Africa with its great plateaux, its hungry acres, its relatively cheap land and its small population does not call for any intensive skyscraping effort … a series of skyscraper cities a few hundreds of miles apart with a few buildings in between is not an entrancing vision of the future.

Nonetheless, by the mid 1930s the skyscraper – albeit a modest creature compared with its gigantic American counterparts – had become one of the most salient manifestations of the relentless march of modernisation and progress in South Africa's burgeoning cities. As we have seen in relation to the SANTAM/SANLAM Building, the skyscraper *per se* was thus a powerful trope of modernity, and the commercial potential of this was not lost on the architects of the Old Mutual building. Not only did the building seemingly conform to the scale and ziggurat appearance of important skyscrapers, particularly in the United States, but this was also engaged self-consciously as part of the building's identity. 'Skyscraper' motifs, echoing the step-pyramid shape of the building, are sandblasted onto all the internal glass panes (figure 96); a constant reiteration and reminder of the claims to 'noteworthy' modernity engaged by its patrons.

This notion of 'noteworthy' modernity was, as we have seen in both the preceding examples, both politically expedient and an essential component of good advertising. While for Grant and the Commercial Union 'modernity' *per se* was considered a sufficient indicator of corporate success and identity, Louw and SANTAM/SANLAM had realised the value of conflating this modernity with a sense of regionalism. In so doing, they succeeded in making corporate identity synonymous with nationalism: to be a client, it implied, was to be patriotic, and in the context of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s, as we have seen, this was a powerful sentiment. In an increasingly commercially competitive and politically volatile environment, the Old Mutual was quick to realize on which side its

political bread was buttered. If it was going to maintain its credibility as one of the oldest and largest of South Africa's corporate giants, it was going to have to produce a landmark building that, like the SANLAM/SANTAM building, was unmistakably South African, but that, unlike SANLAM/SANTAM, appealed to both English and Afrikaner constituencies.

This heady mixture of commercialism and political correctness begins with the choice of materials. Although constructed almost entirely in concrete, the building is clad in solid grey granite, with red marble facing at ground and first floor levels and around the entrance (figure 97). The granite was quarried from a single boulder from the Paarl Mountain[27] and, according to an advertorial in the *Cape Times* (1940), considered "the best material to convey the feeling of strength and durability, both of the building and the organisation which it houses." The granite facing was further seen to be in sympathy with its context, a crucial element in terms of equating the quasi-national identity of the company with a broader national identity. As *The South African Architect* (1940: 383) noted,

> Viewed from the mountain slopes against a background of sea and sky, the building shows just proportion and a simplicity of conception that make it truly great. Even against the drop-scene of Table Mountain, which takes [away] from the architectural silhouette something of its sharpness and scale, its outline is pleasing and satisfyingly fitted to its site and surroundings.

The sculptured frieze – the work of Ivan Mitford-Barberton[28] - surrounding the building on all three of its façades and hailed at the time as "the longest piece of sculpturing ever executed" (*Cape Times*,1940: unnumbered page), is seen as very much in keeping with the restrained, modernistic style of the building. It also locates it, by virtue of its iconography, unequivocally in South Africa.

> Meaningless ornamentation has been avoided, and interest is focused by that form of architectural expression best suited to our climate and sun angle – sculpture in low incised relief – in the form of a frieze. Our sunlight being particularly hard and white, the shadows show densely black. Accordingly, we incline to an architecture of simple surface decoration, in which cornices are avoided, and a strong emphasis is placed upon ornamented angles to form a towering silhouette (*South African Architect*, 1940: 385).

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[27] The town of Paarl is associated with the origins of Afrikaans, and is thus home to the *Taalmonument*.

[28] Ivan Mitford-Barberton (1896 – 1976). Born in Somerset East, Mitford-Barberton studied at the Grahamstown School of Art (1923 – 25) and at the Royal College of Art in London, under Derwent Wood (1871-1926) and Henry Moore (1898-1986). See his autobiography (1962).

The notion of the building's – and, by extension, the company's – claim to an authentically South African identity is consistently reinforced by repeated reference in contemporary accounts of the building to the fact that

> the whole of the design, construction of the building, and the decorations have been carried out by South Africans, with South African materials, with the exception of machinery and such items as could not be procured locally (*Cape Times*,1940: unnumbered page).

One thing that could certainly be procured locally was the well-rehearsed story of South Africa's 'strenuous' history, and the patrons lost no time in populating their building with as many variations on this theme as there were surfaces to decorate. As Ruth Prowse (*Cape Times*, 1940: unnumbered page) noted,

> No better evidence of the part that Big Business is playing in the patronage of the arts in the modern world is to be found than in the great building of the S. A. Mutual that has risen in the centre of Cape Town to become so notable a landmark. The Directors of the Society with their architects have shown their sense of this wider responsibility to the community by their employment of sculptors and painters about the building … [the architects and artists have] … successfully made of the whole structure a very remarkable expression of the developments of the past, and of confidence in the future.

Corporate identity is thus conflated shamelessly with national history in constructing an identity of a company and a people united in its diversity, blessed with natural abundance and not a little exoticism. Mitford-Barberton's frieze engages these ideas unreservedly. "The sculptured frieze surrounding the entire building," continued Prowse,

> depicts historical subjects. On either side of the main entrance in Darling-street [*sic*] are shown the landing of Van Riebeeck and the arrival of the 1820 Settlers, with other well-known episodes in the history of South Africa and the neighbouring territories commemorated in the rest of the frieze. The panels around the main entrance are devoted to South African industries – mining, agriculture, and so on. South African motifs are used throughout the decoration of the building.

In his autobiography Mitford-Barberton (1962: 63) describes the frieze as

> An historical granite frieze, 386 feet [117.65 metres] in length, the longest in Africa … [and also several high-relief figures of] … nine large native types [*naturelletipes*]; these figures are 13 feet [3.96 metres] high and each head weighs three tons. Higher up on the building are heads of an elephant and a baboon, each 8 feet [2.44 metres] high, and on the tower are four native masks [*naturellemaskers*], in granite, of the same height [my translation].

Progressing from the tableaux on the Darling Street façade, which deal, predictably in the political context of the time, respectively with the origins of Dutch and English colonisation of South Africa (figure 99), are nine subjects

depicting the history of the four provinces on the Parliament Street elevation. The narrative, according to Prowse (*Cape Times*, 1940: unnumbered page), is as follows:

> [G]allant sailors from an English ship land on the shores of Table Bay to search for letters; they have with them a carved 'Post Office' stone to place on letters left behind. Next comes the Building of the Castle, with the women and children of the Settlement playing a prominent part in the work. Then the Emancipation of the slaves, with farmers and their wives watching doubtfully the wild rejoicings of the slaves.
>
> For Natal, Captain Gardiner is shown negotiating with Chaka in 1835 at what is now Durban. Two episodes form The Great Trek [represent] the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, scenes of home and family life of the time being carried on in the wilderness.

It is interesting how Prowse's interpretation of these images reinforces the extent to which they engage notions of domesticity, as well as the extent to which this is constructed as the historical prerogative of all South Africans. This clearly implies the role of a nurturing social benefactor with which the company wishes to be identified, while neatly glossing over some of the more problematic aspects of the histories it engages (only hinted at in the 'doubtful' attitude of the farmers and their wives towards the emancipated slaves' 'wild rejoicings').

The Old Mutual, as I have noted, also had business interests elsewhere in the subcontinent, and the frieze thus contains scenes that allude to the broader Southern African polity. Five scenes depicting historical events, all of which resonate in some way or another with the notion of the ostensible civilising mission of imperialism in neighbouring territories under British rule, decorate the Longmarket Street façade. Prowse (*Cape Times*, 1940: unnumbered page) describes these as follows:

> On the coast of South West Africa, Bartholomew Dias landed and erected a Cross [*sic*]. This earliest record in South African history is followed by a comparatively recent episode for Southern Rhodesia; Cecil Rhodes alone at the Indaba with the Matabele in the Matoppos; in the foreground is seated the aged mother of Mosilikatzi [*sic*].
>
> Livingstone, carrying on his three activities of preaching, healing and freeing slaves, represents Northern Rhodesia; a freed slave standing with arms outstretched symbolizes the Cross. The discovery of Kilimanjaro by the German Missionary Rhebmann is the subject used for Tanganyika Territory, and the final section, for Kenya Colony, shows Fort Jesus on the coast being defended against the Turks by Arab inhabitants who later, in 1886, appealed for and were granted the protection of Great Britain.

The final image on this façade is that of a banana tree, the last of the ubiquitous images of indigenous fauna and flora occurring throughout the building, inside and out, under which appears Mitford-Barberton's signature.

The reiteration of these themes of the historic European supremacy over the African subcontinent, and particularly the emphasis on the ostensibly benevolent, paternalistic role that the colonizers played, comes to stand – by the uneasy logic of corporate capitalism – for the 'authentic' South African character of the company. This is made particularly clear when one considers the binary opposition that is constructed whereby civilisation and progress are equated with whites, while blacks, true to the notions of 'primitivism' that inform the programme as a whole, appear only as slaves, workers, savages, or ethnic types, generally devoid of any identity other than that projected for them by the colonists. Thus, they are depicted as labourers in the employ of whites, slaves to or receivers of bartered goods from the former, or in some way being affected by the intervention of whites. In short, blacks do not exist unless they are being converted by missionaries, freed from slavery, or rescued from tyranny (the only exception being, perhaps, the scene depicting Gardiner's negotiations with Shaka, although this dialogue was, as history shows, decidedly one-sided).

Where whites are absent in the same setting, blacks are shown as being either adversely affected by their 'uncivilised' codes of behaviour, or as 'noble savages', subject to openly reductive racial classification. The nine large heads on the Parliament Street façade (figures 100 and 101), for example, which in denoting Xhosa, Pedi, Masai, Matabele, Basuto, Barotse, Kikuyu, Zulu and Bushman 'types' become tropes of the essential African character of the various regions in which the company had business interests. These were described patronisingly by Prowse (*Cape Times*, 1940: unnumbered page) as "look[ing] gravely down in their primitive dignity on the passing crowd." Although categorised according to their ethnicity (and, as such, a reminder – like the Zulu Room at South Africa House (see Chapter 2) – of the growing interest during this period in *volkekunde* and its obsession with essentialist notions of ethnicity and culture) they are nonetheless as much tokens of exoticism as the 'native masks' and elephant and baboon heads that grace the tower (figures 102 and 103).

The one scene devoted, according to Prowse (Cape Times 1940: unnumbered page) to the "Natives of the Union" is 'the Dream of Nongkause [*sic*]' (figure 104).

The narrative of this panel refers to the unfortunate events of 1856 – 7 when the adolescent Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse, guided by a vision of the resurrection of ancestral spirits and the disappearance of the English from Africa, induced her people – divided and depressed by increasingly oppressive colonialist rule – to slaughter all their cattle and destroy their crops. By February 1857 this destruction was complete; the only result being the virtual destruction of the Xhosa nation due to the widespread disease and starvation that resulted from these actions. As Welsh (2000: 219) puts it, the consequent plight of the Xhosa

> made their assimilation into colonial organisation inevitable. It suited the Governor that [their] desperate state … forced them onto the labour market. 'A restless nation,' he told the Cape Assembly on 7 April 1857, 'who for years have harassed the frontier, may now to a great extent be changed into useful labourers.'

The selection of this episode to represent black South Africans not only gives an insight into the patronizing attitude of white hegemony that saw blacks as ignorant children that needed to be protected from themselves, but is also a telling indictment of the essentially racist attitudes of the corporate capitalism of the day. The depiction of whites, on the other hand, is always in terms of their status as colonial explorers, proselytizing missionaries, philanthropists, or industrious achievers laying claim to the bounty that is theirs by virtue of their courageousness in braving the dangers of the Dark Continent.

Mitford-Barberton was also responsible for the decorative motifs on the stainless steel doors of the lifts and for the carving of a continuous stinkwood frieze above the dado in the Board Room, in both cases incorporating indigenous animal and flower motifs. The designs for the lift doors, etched onto the metal, depict fourteen different species of birds and animals, systematically arranged across the various levels of the building so that each floor appears to have a different motif (although the sequence is, in fact, repeated every six floors). "Within the building", enthused Ruth Prowse (*Cape Times*, 1940: unnumbered page), "little designs of South African beasts and flowers … etched on the dull stainless steel of the lift doors, take the eye with pleasure in a search for aesthetic adventures." That these 'aesthetic adventures' reinforce – at every turn – the notion of indigenousness emphasises once again the extent to which the patrons wished to legitimate their claims to an 'authentic' South African identity.

Above Mitford-Barberton's frieze in the Board Room is a mural designed and finished by Joyce Ord-Brown,[29] executed in coloured stains on pale sycamore wood paneling. In the early 1930s Ord-Brown had been one of the hopefuls who had petitioned Herbert Baker for work on the South Africa House project, writing to him that

> I have done murals in Tempra [sic] Colour and am about to do one on wood, which seems to be an ideal material for large decorative panels, especially natives, when it is French polished the colours are much enriched. I have been studying the various native types for years and think they make splendid subjects for decorative work…. I have a number of other ideas in the rough of natives dancing etc. (BaH 31/5: 20 March 1932).

Baker (BaH 31/5: 12 April 1932) had politely responded that her designs showed "some sense of the decorative values which are necessary for mural paintings" and that he liked her "drawings of natives; the women with the water pots and skirts have something of the high decorative quality of Indian water carriers, which are a decorative feature in India." Nothing, however, came of this, and the Old Mutual project in effect provided Ord-Brown an opportunity to exercise her technique on a large scale. She had to abandon, however, the 'splendid subject' of 'natives' – perhaps it was felt that the decorative possibilities of that particular subject had been exhausted, in this context, by Mitford-Barberton – and was commissioned to produce a panel representing Cape Town as the "Tavern of the Seas" (Anonymous, 1940: unnumbered page).

Although the mural also serves to describe the historical importance of Cape Town as the mid-point between East and West, in its details it is light-hearted and whimsical in character and includes vignettes of mermaids conversing with penguins, cartoon-like whales cheerfully navigating stylised waves, and various mythical marine figures. Maps representing the Northern and Southern Hemispheres respectively decorate the unbroken expanses of wall on either end of the room, with ships of different ages and types as well as contemporary aeroplanes indicating historical and contemporary trade routes. A stylised depiction of the Old Mutual building, offset against a thatched Cape Dutch farmhouse, dominates the foot of the map of Africa, suggesting notions of past

[29] Joyce Ord-Brown (1894 – 1974). Born in Port Shepstone, Ord-Brown studied at the Westminster and Lambeth Art Schools (1909 – 1911) under Walter Sickert, and completed an Art Teacher's Diploma at the Cape Town Art School in 1914. Her trademark style of painting ethnographic subjects, usually in oil washes on polished wood, won her a number of public commissions in the 1930s, including small murals in the offices of the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Finance and Defence. See Berman, Ogilvie.

and present, old and new, all conflated into the indigenous magnificence that is the Old Mutual.

The *pièce de résistance* of the interior decoration, however, is the Assembly Hall, originally intended as a meeting room for policyholders. The walls of this hall are lavishly decorated with an extensive mural programme by Le Roux Smith Le Roux (figure 105). These murals depict "the pageant of South Africa's material development during the century of the Society's existence" (Simons, 1995: 126), and show a faithful application of all the technical lessons Le Roux had acquired, along with Eleanor Esmonde-White, during their sojourn in Europe in the mid 1930s on the South Africa House project (see Chapter 2). Indeed, the murals are very similar in scale, concept, and general appearance to those in the 'Zulu room'. The iconography of the Old Mutual murals, however, clearly owes more to the Diego Rivera's 1933 frescoes of Modern Industry at the Detroit Institute of Arts (but without their implicit socialist references[30]) than to the canon of primitivism, engaging, as they do, themes of progress, industry, and the acquisition of material wealth through diligent labour.

In this respect, they are strongly reminiscent of the two panels that Le Roux completed for the Magistrate's Court in Johannesburg in 1938. Entitled *Justice and Industry* and *Justice and Agriculture*, these panels are in many ways a direct quotation of Rivera's work both in terms of style, as well as in terms of narrative structure. Outsized figures of 'Justice' dominate allegories of work and progress, and, like Rivera's panels on similar themes, the simplicity and boldness of their design unequivocally announce their didactic intent. Unlike Rivera's work, however, these panels are not geared to stimulating social comment and debate as they are to entrenching officially sanctioned ideas about the economic and social *status quo*: Justice, these works seem to imply, clearly favours the hardworking capitalist; a self-congratulating theme that is never far from the iconography of the Old Mutual frescoes (and that could not be further from Rivera's Marxist sympathies!).

On the long expanse of wall above the entrance to the room, the narrative commences with a depiction of the Great Trek (figure 106), out of which follows a depiction of pioneer mining and agricultural activities (figure 107). On the two

[30] See Kozloff (1974) for a discussion of the problematic depiction of "proletarian art under capitalist patronage" that characterises Rivera's murals.

unbroken expanses of wall at either end of the room are representations of the modern result of these activities, prosperous contemporary industry and agriculture (figures 108 and 109).

As the decoration of this room was not undertaken until the building operations were complete, painting was still in progress when the building opened in 1940 and the programme was only completed in 1942. By that time, the interest roused by the new building was considerably dampened by the pressures of the Second World War. Although a contemporary critic, C. R. Knox, commenting on the work in progress (1941: 25), conjectured that "future South African guide books will not be behind the Americans in recommending this remarkable work as one of the artistic achievements in the country", the literature dealing with this work (as, indeed, with most of the contemporaneous works discussed in this thesis) is meagre. It is referred to frequently in popular journals as work-in-progress, but there is no comprehensive account of the response to it when unveiled. In her brief entry on Le Roux, Esmé Berman (1993: 259) apropos of this work comments on the stylistic similarities to "the social realism of Diego Riviera [*sic*]" and presciently suggests, "the public soon becomes oblivious to such embellishments and it is unlikely that there are many people who continue to remark [on the murals'] presence."

The longest contemporary account is by A. C. Bouman (1941: 9) in *Die Huisgenoot*, in which he discusses Le Roux's South Africa House, Johannesburg Magistrate's Court, and Old Mutual panels in order to advance the thesis that "South Africa, thanks to its beautiful, dry atmosphere is by nature suitable for this art form [that is, fresco (my translation)]." Praising the "young Afrikaner['s]" facility for drawing as evidenced both by the 'Zulu room' and in murals for the Cunard liner, the *Queen Mary*, he describes the by then completed *Voortrekker* panel as follows:

> The designs represent one hundred years of highlights from South African history, particularly the development of the country since the days of the Great Trek. A strident rhythm pulsates through all three panels which form a unit; but at present it is only possible to admire the elegant piece that is fully completed … The representation [of the Great Trek] is perceived and presented in historically pure terms, with sufficiently

realistic detail to lend it a strong sense of local colour[31] (my translation).

Once again, the dual considerations of truth to region and historical accuracy are cited in support of an iconography that, ultimately, does little more than valorise the corporation's inflated sense of its own significance. "But a realistic representation of the event as a whole is justly absent", he continues,

> No incidents such as an ox-wagon about to be overturned by enormous boulders. No trek leaders despairingly jumping around in an attempt to control recalcitrant and nervous oxen. No need for boastful effects or sensationalism. Much more a sober procession, a slightly cool objectivity, with use of small details such as plants and flowers to complete the narrative. The pretty white horse – white is an important, prominent element in the construction of the colour harmonies! – lends a subtle medieval-heroic flavour and harmonizes especially well with the white *kappies* of the Voortrekker women, who move forward like a procession of pious nuns – if I may use this anachronism! … The colours, particularly the dominant colours, are earth colours, the warm red-oxide of South Africa's building soil[32] (my translation).

Indeed, Le Roux's depiction of the Great Trek is markedly different in tone and character to those of Juta and Amshewitz, discussed in previous chapters. Whereas both Juta and Amshewitz had, in their different ways, focused on constructing out of the tawdry facts of the Great Trek a sense of heroism and drama, Le Roux finds a sense of sobriety and decorum. This must be understood in relation to the fact that he was painting after the centenary celebrations of 1938. By this time the mythic construction of the Great Trek as the signal event upon which the 'civil religion' of the Afrikaners was based was, thanks to the concerted culture mongering of prominent Afrikaner nationalists (see Chapter 1), firmly embedded in the national psyche. Accordingly, the *gravitas* of Le Roux's description resonates strongly with the quasi-religious tone of the centenary celebrations, which focused a great deal of its energies on constructing a 'chosen

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[31] *Die stukke stel voor honderd jaar Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis in hoofmomente, veral die groei van die land sinds die dae van die Groote Trek. Daar rys en daal 'ngroot ritme deur al drie 'panele', wat 'n eenheid vorm; maar dit is nou nog net moontlik om die luukse stuk in volle ontplooiing te bewonder … Die voortselling is histories suiwer aangevoel en afgebeeld, met voldoende elemente van realistiese aanskouing om dit 'n sterk lokale kleur te verleen.*

[32] *Maar 'n realisties uitbeelding van die episode as 'n geheel is tereg afwesig. Geen insidente soos 'n ossewa wat dreig om van die pad af gestamp te word deur yslike klippe nie. Geen touleiers wat wanhopig rondspring om weerbarstige en senuweeagtige osse reg te ruk nie. Geen lus vir effekbejag of sensasie nie. Maar veel meer 'n stemmige prosessie, 'n effens koele objektiwiteit, met gebruikmaking van klein détails soos plante en blomme om die lynespel volledig te maak. Die fraai wit perde – wit is 'n belangrike, vername element in die opbou van die kleure-harmonie! – gee 'n effens Middeleus-heroiese kleur, dit harmonieer besonder gelukkig met die wit Voortrekker kappies, wat soos 'n prosessie van vrome none – as ek dié anakronisme mag gebruik! – voortbeweeg … Die kleure, veral die hoofkleure, is kleure van die aarde, die warm oker-rooi van Suid-Afrika se bougrond.*

race' scenario for the Voortrekkers. (And of course, its natural corollary, the inalienable right of the Afrikaner nation to the land, paid for in blood and sweat by the righteousness and selfless sacrifices of its ancestors.) In this context, Bouman's reference to the "pious nuns" is an appropriate – if unfortunate, given its avowed Protestantism – simile.

In these terms, too, it is significant that 'progress' begins with the Great Trek. Le Roux is clearly responding to the increasingly powerful nationalist sentiments – what Welsh (2000: 413) describes as "hardening attitudes among the Afrikaners, accompanied by growing self-confidence" that followed in the wake of the centenary celebrations. The by then standard companion piece to the Voortrekkers, the 1820 Settlers (see Chapters 2 and 3), is entirely absent from the scheme.

However, given the Old Mutual's drive to extend its customer base to the widest possible constituency, I would argue that, rather than promoting Afrikaner nationalism *per se*, this absence in fact implies an elision of the Boer/Brit divide. Andrew Crampton (2001: 240), writing on the Voortrekker Monument as being partly symbolic of the "lasting peace between the two nations [*i.e.* the English and the Afrikaner]" argues that there was a significant ideological shift in 1940s Afrikaner nationalism. In these terms it was possible to imagine "unity between two distinct ethnic groups [in which the] dominant partner … is the Afrikaner who is inviting English speakers to become part of the new Afrikaner led South African nation." In these terms the Great Trek, in addition to appealing to Afrikaner sentiment (and thus wooing customers away from SANTAM/SANLAM) in effect becomes a trope of the pioneering spirit of its European forebears that enabled South Africa to achieve the social and economic status that it enjoyed by the end of the 1930s. Knox (1941: 36), clearly responding to these implicit dynamics of South Africanism, suggested that

> to the artist like Le Roux – the best type of cultured Afrikaner – the country must undoubtedly look for its artistic leadership. Every passage of his work breathes a humane and democratic outlook. He has seen both Fascism and National-Socialism [*sic*] at work [this is probably a reference to the fact that Le Roux had spent most of the 1930s in Europe] and is a bitter enemy of these systems for their crushing and prostitution of Art. He knows his own people intimately and has watched with dismay how their genuine aspirations towards art are being exploited and debased by

> 'cultural' phrase-mongering among those who are friends not of art but of Fascism.[33]

Since it deals with notions of industry and progress, the mural presents a valorisation of work and workers that is, as I have noted, not dissimilar to Rivera's worker-oriented socialist iconography of the 1930s. Knox (1941: 36) recognised this, suggesting, "In his bold and even devoted treatment of mechanism as a material for art, Le Roux reflects to some extent the influence of the Mexicans, the greatest school of mural painters in the world to-day [*sic*]," but more important is the propagandistic potential inherent in this. "Propaganda of the best type is urgently needed to-day [*sic*]," he continues, "to unify the split ranks of the African people." For the Old Mutual, *via* Le Roux's sometimes bewildering *mélange* of people, animals, and machinery, this unity could best be achieved by industriousness coupled with capitalist self-interest – these things attended to, the niceties of national belonging would take care of themselves.

The company's celebration of its own role in this fable of wealth and prosperity is expressed quite clearly in the 'Agriculture' panel, which is situated above the stage that, practically speaking, is the focus of the room. At the very top of this panel is a formalised depiction of Cape Town set against the backdrop of Table Mountain, as if viewed from the harbour, with a ship in the foreground (figure 110). As with the Cape Town detail in Ord-Brown's Board Room mural, the Old Mutual Building dominates the skyline at the centre of the composition. The image conforms to a certain extent to the actual impression of Cape Town that would have greeted one's arrival in Table Bay harbour in the early 1940s: before reclamation and the completion of the Foreshore development, the Old Mutual building certainly dominated the Cape Town skyline. Moreover, the Assembly Hall was originally so designed that it would have commanded a view of the entire harbour, and in a sense, it is the same view that is mirrored here. Thus an absolute sense of place, and the legitimacy that this implies, is once again reaffirmed. In terms of the notions of 'civil religion' discussed earlier, it is interesting to note on closer analysis that, whereas most of the buildings depicted around what is obviously the Old Mutual building in this detail are generalised

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[33] Knox seems to be referring here to the *Ossewabrandwag*, a pro-fascist, quasi-military organisation founded in the wake of the Great Trek centenary celebrations in 1938. By the time he was writing, in 1941, the organisation was under the leadership of J.F.J. van Rensburg, one time administrator of the Orange Free State, who had well-publicised Nazi sympathies (Giliomee, 2003: 442).

to the point of meaninglessness, the characteristic steeple of the Groote Kerk is unmistakeable.

In terms of contemporary South African socio-political dynamics, the representation of industry and labour in the programme as a whole inevitably separates into the polarities of race and gender. While Le Roux depicts whites with distinct physiognomies (in fact, a number of self-portraits and portraits of prominent Capetonians are to be discerned in the murals) (figure 111), as operating machinery (figure 112), or commanding positions of authority, blacks appear only in a servile capacity and are presented in terms of generalised physical types (figure 113). White workers are shown as having the implements of industry firmly in their command and are thus in a position of authority whereby the control all means of production. Three white workers raising a pipe (figure 114) are among the few whites engaged in taxing labour, but are distinguished from black labourers by their pristine white overalls, where the latter – a few workers in shirtsleeves notwithstanding – have only the colour of their skin as a badge of their industry and a mark of their station.

The idea constantly reiterated, wherever blacks and whites are shown engaged upon their respective labours in the same panel, is that while black workers are entirely servile 'beasts of burden', white workers are concerned with vital activities for the common good. The white-collar worker in the bottom of the panel devoted to 'Agriculture', who cradles in his arms a sheaf of corn he has most certainly not personally harvested, seems to consolidate this notion and to symbolise the rewards of positive endeavour for the white capitalist.

In keeping with the paternalistic, patriarchal tone of the programme of the whole is the portrayal of women. In marked contrast to the assertive *volksmoeders* that we encountered in Chapter 3, the Voortrekker women form an enclave of solemn, hooded figures who rally around their children and men, fulfilling the role of a primary system of passive support and nurturing. The only female workers presented are in the 'Agriculture' panel: to the left of the centre of the composition three coloured women are shown handling large baskets used for collecting harvested fruit. As with the Voortrekker women their heads are covered, but while the *kappies* worn by the white women are at once a protection from the sun and a mark of fashion and propriety, the *doeke* that these working women wear are strictly functional, while at the same time being a stereotype of

a certain sub-cultural convention of dress. The relative depiction, then, of whites and blacks, men and women all in their 'rightful place' not only reinforces the conventional social stereotypes of the time, but also resonates strongly with the fusion government's 'civilised labour' policy discussed earlier, and which effectively excluded blacks from full participation in the South African economy.

4.5 Conclusion: the uneasy bedfellows of commerce and identity politics

Large-scale commercial buildings occupy an important place in the urban landscape. While not strictly 'public' in the sense that they are owned by government structures and therefore 'belong' to citizens, they nonetheless play a similar role in terms of reflecting, constructing, or embedding social and cultural values (a point which was made abundantly and tragically clear by the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001). The role they play, therefore, in terms of articulating the nation code – and, by implication, a sense of national belonging – is not insignificant.

As we have seen in the examples above, this articulation underscores the extent to which political issues are bound with economic ones. Afrikaner nationalism, for example, needed the economic empowerment of *volkskapitalisme* if it was to succeed, and *volkskapitalisme* in turn had to be given a public face if it were to exert a meaningful influence on the public imagination. In the context of the early 1930s, the SANTAM/SANLAM building represented for its constituency more than a 'private' corporate headquarters; it was in effect a public statement of an aspirant national identity as surely as if it were a state-sponsored monument. Not only did it succeed in promoting a certain style of corporate capitalism, it effectively imagined and created the public for whom this form of commerce had a particular relevance within a discourse of national belonging. The rhetoric of modernity that it engaged in turn had the powerful effect of validating these aspirations, partly by allowing its public to imagine itself as part of the contemporary world of corporate capitalism, and partly by demonstrating a refusal to conform to debilitating stereotypes.

The same, obviously, cannot be said for the Commercial Union Building, whose flamboyant and self-conscious modernity is clearly in the service of flagrant self-promotion. Nonetheless, the very self-consciousness of this modernity seems to carry with it smug assumptions of cultural superiority, the very refusal to engage in scoring political points with an actual or imagined constituency suggesting the

extent to which its patrons remained unthreatened by the ideological drama unfolding around them. The Old Mutual building, at the end of the decade, straddles both these positions. In scale and conception, its 'modernity' quite outclassed its rivals,[34] while the imaginary of national belonging that it engaged provided, in the political context of the time, a sober and balanced view of the ideological divide between Boer and Brit.

A decade ago, in my first tentative foray into the politics of the decorative programme of the Old Mutual building, I concluded that, "while the images are of stylistic and historical interest, their subject matter is essentially outdated and certainly inappropriate to the corporate image of big business in South Africa today" (Freschi, 1994: 57). While in essence this conclusion has not changed, it is important to note that today none of these buildings houses the corporations for which they were built (the Old Mutual still occupied the building in 1994 when I first wrote about it). As a company, the Commercial Union has long since disappeared into the complex web of acquisitions and mergers that characterises the insurance industry, while both Sanlam (the less cumbersome acronym being adopted in the 1940s) and the Old Mutual soon found their over-decorated but under-sized 'skyscrapers' to be insufficient to their needs, and built larger premises elsewhere. In fact, increasing urban de-centralisation (coupled, in the case of the Old Mutual, with demutualisation) has meant that the corporate identity of these organisations is no longer so heavily invested with architectural identity. Today one is more likely to encounter the various branches of these corporations in office parks, whose dubious claims to architectural interest reside solely in the extent to which they engage that bewildering fantasy of pseudo-regionalism, the 'Tuscan' style. The SANTAM/SANLAM Building, now known as 'Waalburg,' is given over to rented office accommodation. Both the Commercial Union building, now known as 'Market House', and the Old Mutual building, following a recent trend towards the gentrification of former Central Business Districts in Johannesburg and Cape Town, are being converted into luxury apartments for well-heeled neo-urbanites.

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[34] Such is the potency of the Old Mutual building's lavish styling that it continues to enjoy – at least amongst South African writers – the reputation as "Africa's Art Deco jewel" (van der Walt 2003: 17), or, grandiloquently, "the most perfect building in the Art Deco style ever to be erected in Africa" (Simons, 1995: 131). Unsurprisingly, it was chosen as the venue for the launch of the seventh World Congress on Art Deco, held in Cape Town in 2003.

The ideological posturing of the decorative programmes of the SANTAM/SANLAM and the Old Mutual Buildings is thus effectively rendered meaningless. At best, their stylistic anachronisms render them a quaint remnant of the past, their offensiveness diluted by the kind of unquestioning nostalgia that confers on any manifestations of the popular culture of the past the status of a relic. At worst, they are simply another odious reminder of the racist divisions that, *mutatis mutandis*, continue to plague the construction of a South African identity. However, it is ironic how, by a slight shifting and realignment of race and gender roles, South African corporations like the Old Mutual continue to engage notions of South Africanism as a fundamental component of their corporate identity. The medium, of course, has changed. Television commercials, billboards and the sponsorship of high-profile sporting events have taken the place of ornate semi-public buildings, but the expedient elision of corporate and national identity remains essentially unchanged. Big business and politics, it seems, are doomed eternally to be uneasy bedfellows, especially in so far as they engage an imaginary of national belonging in order to legitimate their claims to authority.

Nationalism is just as much about the failure of alternative projects and identities as about success for the new identities and policies proclaimed by the interpreters. – Dan O'Meara (1997)

CHAPTER FIVE: Unity then and now – public building in democratic South Africa and the lessons of the 1930s

Just over a decade into democracy, South Africa remains a country in search of its identity. While it is tempting to view the implementation of a multi-racial parliamentary system in 1994 as the triumphant consolidation of a truly post-colonial African identity, the fact is that it is not always clear what this means, how it should be proclaimed, and what the implications are for the project of nation building. Its roots having been disturbed so many times – by imperial conquest, internecine warfare, and oppressive minority nationalism – it is little wonder that the notion of what it means to be South African has failed to take a firm and unequivocal hold.[1] 'New' South African nationalism, it seems, is less and less about ideology and more and more about identity; in effect, a sense of 'who we are' as opposed to 'what we think' seems to have become the guiding principle. This is underscored on the one hand by idealised notions of compatible diversity – the 'rainbow nation' of Desmond Tutu's benign imagining – and on the other by the uncritical (and highly ironic) acceptance of republicanism, that smug love child of Afrikaner nationalism, as an appropriate model of government. "Citizens *in* contemporary nation states," offer Jean and John Comaroff (2001: 635),

> whether or not they are primarily citizens *of* nation states, seem widely able to re-imagine nationhood in such a way as to embrace the ineluctability of internal difference: 'multiculturalism', the 'rainbow nation', and terms of similar resonance provide a ready argot of accommodation, even amidst bitter contestation.

[1] It is interesting to view President Thabo Mbeki's famous pronouncement 'I am an African' in this context. 'I am a *South* African' as Dan Roodt (2003) somewhat cynically contends, might have "implied an acceptance of …[the] tradition developed by the white community and especially the Afrikaners" and so be at odds with the notion of a 'true' post-colonial, pan-African identity (which, by the president's own telling, can include the Boers as victims of Western imperialism). Equally cynically, Christoph Marx (2002: 56) argues, "such rhetoric remains a poor substitute for a clear statement of what exactly it means to be an African."

The problem, in effect, centres on the construction of 'nation building' in an increasingly 'post-national' world. As Delanty and Jones (2002: 454) put it,

> National identity must now live in a world where other collective identities – gender, ethnic, ecological, regional, cosmopolitan ones – have attained the dominance that class identities once enjoyed and these are less easily absorbed by nationalism which has lost its former exclusive priority in the order of collective loyalties.

While autochthony, the limits of sovereignty, and access to free-market capitalism (or, where 'we' *come from*, the *space* that 'we' inhabit, and what 'we' *do*) have variously been proposed as starting points for imagining a new South African identity, the question is still open. In democratic South Africa, in short, the issue remains as to the routes available for coaxing this cultural nationalism into a rooted 'imagined community', without which, contemporary social theory tells us, no nation can truly be said to exist.

It is interesting, and, in terms of the issue of identity nationalism I have pointed out above, instructive to note that the ANC-led South African government has not chosen large-scale public buildings as one of its preferred routes to re-branding nationalism. Instead, it has, for the most part, simply appropriated the grandiose piles of the *ancien régime*, papered over or removed the more odious reminders of the past, and invented hybrid traditions to fit the hybrid spaces. An obvious case in point is the Union Buildings in Pretoria (figure 115), designed by Herbert Baker to celebrate the unification under the imperial crown of the "two races [*i.e.*, in the political parlance of the day, the English and Afrikaner constituencies] of South Africa" (Baker, 1944: 61) in 1910. In the interests – in Wren's words – of 'establishing a nation' and in accordance with Baker's own notions of 'sentiment' (Baker, 1944: 88) as a guiding principle in design, he married the Cape Dutch-inspired classicism pioneered at Rhodes's Cape Town residence Groote Schuur with explicit references to Italian Renaissance villas. The 'sentiment' at play thus imbues the building with a desirable sense of an ostensible regionalism that speaks as much to the values of the Afrikaner component of its constituency, as to the imperialist imaginary exemplified by Cecil Rhodes' Cape-to-Cairo fantasy, discussed in relation to South Africa House in Chapter 2. Within the elaborate symbolism of unity – not least the twin domed towers "symbolizing the two races of South Africa" (Baker, 1944: 60) – no provision was made for black South Africans other than the open courtyard in which, as the architect put it, the "natives of the Union [could]

experience the majesty of government" without actually entering its hallowed halls. That these self-same 'natives' are now firmly entrenched in power is not only a sublime instance of poetic justice, but also a reminder of the fact that as societies change, the built environment is forced to express, clarify, or reinforce diverse kinds of identities (Vale, 1999: 396).

Despite this apparent loss of faith in the ability of state-led architectural projects to embody the nation code, it is not entirely correct to suggest that there have been no significant new public building projects since 1994. The recently completed (2003) Northern Cape Legislature (figure 116) and the new Constitutional Court (figure 117) in Johannesburg (2004), parts of which are still under construction, are two cases in point. Both these buildings engage self-consciously with the rhetoric of nation building, in practical as well as symbolic terms, and both boast extensive and much-publicised decorative programmes. These decorative programmes in turn bring many of the issues regarding the articulation of a single 'national identity' in a multi-ethnic, post-colonial African society into sharp focus.

5.1 'An African icon': the Northern Cape Legislature

The Northern Cape is the largest, remotest, and least populated of South Africa's nine post-apartheid provinces. Since it was subsumed under the old Cape Province before 1994, it did not inherit any legislative or administrative infrastructure *per se*, and the national government thus approved the construction of a new legislature building in 1997. After a national competition was held, the project was awarded to Luis Ferreira Da Silva Architects, with South African artist Clive van den Berg heading the design team. Since the legislature would be built *ab initio*, it presented a unique opportunity to create a highly visible practical and symbolic manifestation of democracy at work; a building and a space that would somehow address the expectations of its dispersed and, for the most part, economically disadvantaged and politically fractious, constituency[2]. Moreover, it could do so in a formal language that broke decisively with European prototypes. In short, the building would be, in the

[2] The African National Congress secured the Northern Cape on a knife-edge in 1994, with 15 seats to the National Party's 12. The subsequent entente between the two political rivals – the ANC and the New National Party – has enabled the province to achieve a measure of stability over the past decade, but the New National Party still enjoys substantially higher support than elsewhere in the country (Groenewald, 2004: 6).

words of the official publication that accompanied its opening, 'an African icon' (Malan and McInerney, 2003).

The resulting edifice (figure 118), located on what had been an apartheid-era 'buffer zone' between the traditionally white, colonial-era centre of the diamond-mining town of Kimberley and the predominantly black, low-income residential area of Galeshewe, has thus from its inception been hailed as an extraordinary point of departure for negotiating the thorny issue of public building in the postcolony. At the laying of its foundation stone in 2000, the Minister of Public Works, Stella Sigcau expressed the wish that "its portals [may] indeed resonate echo's [*sic*] of good governance" (Sigcau, 2000) while at its opening in 2003 the Premier of the province, Manne Dipico, reiterated the symbolic significance of the project by proclaiming that

> [the legislature] is a symbol of the great democratic traditions from which we draw our inspiration and our strength … Let this historic site be a witness to a new departure … for the furtherance of mutual understanding and universal progress' (Dipico, 2003).

The Northern Cape Legislature's official website in turn crows ecstatically – if somewhat ungrammatically – that "the government has literally from nothing constructed a new symbol has emerged [*sic*], showing how far we have become [*sic*] as a province" (Northern Cape Legislature Website, 2003).

Political platitudes aside, the complex of buildings certainly makes an impressive statement on the otherwise unremarkable urban landscape of a town perhaps better known for its absence of architecture – the infamous big hole (figure 119) – than for its presence. In some ways reminiscent of Le Corbusier's government buildings, especially in its planning stages, in Chandigarh (1957 – 65), the complex combines a sense of monumentality with dramatic sculptural forms: clean limned glass and concrete structures with sweeping organic curves, coloured in the earthy hues of the dour surrounding landscape (figures 120 and 121). Also like Le Corbusier's Chandigarh, the buildings incorporate elements of the region as monumental coding devices, its sculptural forms in sympathy with the topography and flora of the area (figure 122). As such, it engages a sense of place without resorting to clichéd notions of an 'African' aesthetic; the gimcrack regionalism that characterises much post-1994 South African architecture in its attempt to capitalise on Rainbow Nation jingoism (figure 123).

Given its overt function as decoration, however, this reminds us that notions of 'regionalism' are as much about style – that is, the deliberate choices about the

way something *appears* to be – as they are about more profound issues of identity, or what things ostensibly *are*. Without getting ahead of the argument, it seems to me that the focus in this building is often on paying lip service to stereotyped notions of what constitutes the local, rather than on a committed engagement with the more difficult questions of autochthony that lie under the surface.

A similar set of problems is posed by the Mpumalanga Provincial Government Complex, completed in 2001, and in many ways the Northern Cape Legislature's stylistic and ideological predecessor. That building, too, uses "the surrounding environment [for] contextual and rational clues for the making of form," and, in so doing, ostensibly "integrates the building into its immediate physical context" (Malan and McInerney, 2001: 27). Beyond the implicit (and, I would suggest, somewhat banal) appeal to a sense of *genius loci* – and, increasingly in the South African context, its close relation: political correctness – the overwhelming effect is nonetheless one of a triumph of style over substance. These problems are never far from either of the two examples discussed in this chapter.

Formal similarities notwithstanding, the government buildings at Chandigarh tend overwhelmingly towards a kind of decadent formalism – what Kenneth Frampton (1992: 230) describes as "a city designed for automobiles in a country where many, as yet, still lack a bicycle" – and a fierce monumentality underscored by its brutalist aesthetic. This is, of course, a function of the fact that Chandigarh comes out of the first wave of post-colonialism, and, as such, its 'noteworthy modernity' and eminent authorship place it unequivocally in a post-colonial context defined by the "'old' international political order, [with] its organisation of sovereign nations within the industrial capitalist world system" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001: 632). The 'new' Indian identity, in these terms, was to be defined in terms of the extent to which it could take its 'rightful place' in the international community, while retaining just enough exoticism to remind that community of its privileged 'otherness'.

The Northern Cape Legislature (and, by extension, the Mpumalanga Legislature and the New Constitutional Court), however, belongs to a different epoch, ideologically and stylistically. Jean and John Comaroff (2001: 631) highlight the ideological shift from 'old-style' nationalism to identity politics that characterises the post-modern world as a shift from the understanding,

particularly in the African context, of the nation state as a single, coherent, construct, to "a labile historical *formation*, a polythetic class of polities-in-motion." South Africa, they suggest, as the most recent member of the confraternity of post-colonial African states, brings into sharp relief many of the complexities and contradictions concerning the construction of notions of national belonging in the post-colonial, post-modern context. "That effort, those obsessions," they write,

> reach into diverse realms of collective being-in-the world: into the struggle to arrive at meaningful terms with which to construct a sense of belonging – and hence, of moral and material community – in circumstances that privilege difference; into the endeavour to regulate sovereign borders under global conditions that not only encourage the transnational movement of labour and capital, money and goods, but make them a necessary condition of the wealth of nations; into the often bitter controversies that rage as people assert various kinds of identity to make claims of entitlement and interest; into troubled public discourses on the proper reach of twenty-first century constitutions and, especially, their protection of individual rights; into the complicated processes by which government, non-governmental organisations, citizens acting in the name of civil society, and other social factions, seek to carve out a division of political and social labour; in the implications of *angst* about the decay of public order, about crime both organised and random, about corruption and its policing.

I quote this assessment at length not only as an elegant summary of the *status quo* of South African identity politics, but also because of the extent to which the issues they identify have in one way or another informed – implicitly or explicitly – the decorative programmes of recent South African public buildings.

Returning, then, to the buildings in question, it is important to reiterate the extent to which the loss of faith in the totalising project of modernism, has, in addition to its ideological effects, resulted in a profound re-thinking of the style and function of public buildings. In general, post-modern architecture has been characterised, as I noted in Chapter 1, by a shift in stylistic emphasis from the universal to the particular; from internationalism to regionalism. Also in these terms, the lofty disdain of popular culture that characterised high modernism (and, not least, Le Corbusier's Chandigarh) has been replaced by the playful acceptance of eclecticism and pastiche as necessary – and indeed desirable – aspects of design. A particular stylistic self-consciousness is thus one of the most salient aspects of the design of the Northern Cape Legislature in its attempts to concretise, both literally and metaphorically, the fraught abstractions of identity politics and national belonging.

In keeping with its mandate to capture, in the words of one of the judges, "the spirit and aspirations of the people of the Northern Cape" (Northern Cape Legislature Website, 2003), the design aims above all at accessibility, inclusivity, and relevance (but with a heavy dose of autochthony clumsily masquerading as *genius loci*). The extensive and often whimsical decorative programme was thus conceived as integral to the design. As the Legislature's website informs us:

> [Clive] van den Berg [the artist responsible for the decorative programme] as [*sic*] successfully created an integrated relationship between art and architecture by thinking of the buildings as sculptural statements rather than more traditional western buildings that are decorated only after the building is complete … All in all the completed building is a work of art (Northern Cape Legislature Website, 2003).

However unwittingly, the designers thus clearly found themselves in conversation with Christopher Wren, and his notion of architecture as the 'ornament' of a country (see Introduction). For despite ostensibly eschewing the odious traditions of the west, this was to be a public building in the grand tradition; one that would very self consciously be an 'ornament', while its monumentalizing of regional forms would 'draw people and commerce' and make them love, if not their 'country', certainly their province. Jane Taylor (2003: 21), writing on the newly completed building amplifies this very point. "This," she says, "is one of a few really remarkable new environments in South Africa. It will … remind you of our own rights and tasks as a citizen … [and] … allow you to imagine a landscape built for its people."

This dialogue between form and function, artist and architect, government and citizen, begins with the monumental façade of the Premier's Building; two symmetrically placed, vertical slabs of rust-coloured concrete (figure 124). Somewhat in the tradition of ancient Egyptian monumental funerary architecture, the outlines of two gigantic standing figures – one male, one female – are picked out. Around them are scattered thirteen motifs in the form of low relief metal cut-outs representing various aspects of the province and its history (Malan and McInerney, 2003: 89) – an AIDS ribbon, an open book, a house, and other motifs that have specific resonance with the social topography of the region (figure 125). The slabs are in turn flanked by two 'wings', which the architect based "on a photograph of a be-robed premier raising his arms in a gesture of welcome" (Malan and McInerney, 2003: 89). As an iconographic realisation, in the words of the ruling African National Congress's tireless election slogan, of the

notion of 'a better life for all', the symbolism is clear: the viewer-citizen is invited to yield to the warm embrace of a beneficent government, and imagine him/herself as an integral part of a collective identity. To quote Jane Taylor (2003: 21) again, "the artworks constitute a mnemonic that reminds us of the obligations and rights of our collective custodianship of the law."

Various other sculptural and decorative aspects of the complex continue this complex dialectic of didacticism and celebration: the Tower, an inverted cone sliced diagonally near the top (and once again formally reminiscent of Le Corbusier's Legislature at Chandigarh, as well as of the tower at Great Zimbabwe) adds a dramatic vertical element to the otherwise dominant horizontality of the complex (figure 126). Although it fulfils no practical purpose, the Tower functions ceremonially as the focal point of the complex, as well as providing a highly visible platform from which the Premier can address the populace assembled in the plaza below. Its status as a symbolic reference point for political leadership is underscored by the inclusion of mosaic[3] portrait medallions of former and current South African presidents Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki (figure 127), with an empty medallion serving as a reminder of the changing face of leadership in a democracy (figure 128).

The 'Heroes' Wall,' positioned outside the offices of the Members of the Legislature, pays tribute, also in a series of mosaic portrait medallions, to the largely unsung political and cultural heroes of the liberation struggle (figures 129 and 130).[4] Prominently placed empty medallions, onto which anonymous profiles are pricked out, await future heroes, or perhaps recognize, in the tradition of the 'unknown soldier,' the contribution of ordinary, unnamed citizens (figures 130 and 131).

(This preponderance of mosaic in the decorative programme is interesting, and warrants some comment. Judging both by the Northern Cape Legislature and

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[3] An integral and important part of the decorative programme was the need to involve the local community, create employment, and transfer skills. Ten individuals were thus chosen for the mosaic project and were brought to Kimberley where they resided for the eight months that it took to complete the project while receiving training in mosaic and mould making from Van den Berg and project manager Sean Slemmon. With the assistance of product developers operating in the region, the newly empowered crafters will have the opportunity, now that the project is completed, to make mosaic products that will be sold nationally. The preponderance of mosaic as a pseudo-regionalist element is, as I discuss in the text, in itself problematic.

[4] Jane Taylor notes the difficulty the artists had in reconstructing some of the likenesses since the only images that were available of the 'heroes of significance to the anti-colonial history were documented only in poor quality small snapshots or group photos, from which the artists had to project a viable portrait' (Taylor 2003: 20).

Constitutional Court, as well as by a plethora of recent commercial buildings throughout South Africa, mosaic seems lately to have become a signifier of 'Africa'. This is of course patent nonsense if one is concerned with 'authentic' notions of regional materials and techniques – mosaic, after all, isn't a 'traditional' decorative technique anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa. It seems rather that mosaic – in addition to the practicality of its hardiness in the African climate – represents to the first world sensibility the notion of the 'hand made' or 'craft', and by the uneasy logic of political correctness has thus come to represent 'Africa'.[5])

Mounting the security fence around the perimeter of the complex are cut-out steel heads in profile (figure 132), while large concrete heads, some decorated with mosaics, others with high- or low-relief elements, are scattered randomly throughout the indigenous gardens (figures 133, 134, and 135). The artist describes these as being "drawn from people in the town or on site, but they are not meant to be portraits in any specific sense, rather collective symbols" (Van den Berg 2003: 92). The Legislature's website is more explicit about the potential symbolic value of these images, describing the heads as an emblematic depiction of "the numerous and diverse facial features of people in this region" (Northern Cape Legislature Website, 2003). These heads are thus indicative, according to the website, of the notion that "this is a government that represents and serves all of the numerous cultural groups in the province" (Northern Cape Legislature Website, 2003). Inside the Legislature, on either side of the entrance to the assembly hall, stylised mosaic citizens hold scrolls emblazoned with the dicta of the Constitution (figures 136, 137, and 138), while outside various sculptural topiaries-in-progress add a note of whimsical theatricality (figures 139 and 140), and a ramp connecting the two sections of the Premier's Building is decorated with mosaics illustrating Kimberley past and present (figure 141).

On the face of it, then, the Northern Cape Legislature architecture-as-art offers a compelling alternative to the conventional models and customary expectations of public buildings. As the website puts its:

> The form of the building itself is far from the authoritarian government buildings of the past. There are no columns and hard, rightangled [*sic*] lines. Instead, straight lines are a rarity in this building. Gentle curves

[5] 'Colourfulness' is another attribute gratuitously associated with African sensibilities, and this may well be implicit in the favouring of mosaic in the South African context.

> and friendly angles are the order of the day, making this a place conducive to creativity, diligence and innovative thinking (Northern Cape Legislature Website, 2003).

The public and political success of this building is due in no small measure to the engagingly idiosyncratic style of Van den Berg's decorative programme. Without it – the ostensible integration of art and architecture notwithstanding – the buildings *per se* would read as little more than elaborate studies in carefully considered post-modernism, verging on a kind of 'decadent formalism' of their own. Put differently, while the whimsicality and accessibility of the decorative programme may seduce its public into viewing it as something other than a monumental expression of nationalistic ideals, the fact remains that neither the conception of the project nor its realization move substantially beyond nineteenth-century European notions of architectural didacticism. 'Gentle curves and friendly angles' apart, the complex of buildings presents an undeniably monumental aspect, a shift in scale that sets it deliberately apart, in the tradition of countless public buildings before it, from the rest of the built environment.

This shift in scale, as the historical *sine qua non* of public buildings, has always served to remind visitors, as Murray Edelman (1995: 76) suggests, that they "enter the precincts of power as clients or as supplicants, susceptible to arbitrary rebuffs and favours, and that they are subject to remote authorities they only dimly know or remotely understand." Those who work in the building have, on the other hand, as Lawrence Vale (1999: 392), extrapolating from Edelman, argues, "their own power legitimised by the grandeur of the setting in which it is exercised. Power and powerlessness are [thus] conjoined, and mutually reinforced through the theatricality of architectural monuments." It is a moot point as to whether the 'gentle curves' and 'friendly angles' of the Northern Cape Legislature will prevail over the embedded associations of monumentality.

5.2 'A building and a nation for everyone': the Constitutional Court

The new Constitutional Court in Johannesburg, which opened to great fanfare on Human Rights Day, March 21, 2004 (although parts of the complex are still under construction), is similarly concerned with reconstructing the conceptual bases informing conventional expectations of public building. At once a complex of working buildings, a heritage site, and a community centre, the new

Constitutional Court is a concrete symbol of the notion of redemptive over repressive justice that is at the heart of South Africa's democratic constitution. Built on the site of, and incorporating into its precinct, Johannesburg's infamous fort and 'native prison'[6], the project also recognises that architectural history can be manipulated to suit shifting ideologies.

Following the example of another significant, recent example of the dramatic potential of architecture to give a practical shape to the symbolic imagining of unity, the Berlin Reichstag (figure 142), this is engaged through the metaphors of 'transparency' and 'rebuilding'. As with the Reichstag, large expanses of glass provide observers outside the Constitutional Court with glimpses of its inner workings (figure 143), while sections of the original buildings have been incorporated into the new structures. Also as with the Reichstag, where anti-German, Cyrillic graffiti "chalked onto the wall by the invading Red Army in 1945" (Delanty and Jones, 2002: 456) has been left as a reminder of the building's (and, by extension, the country's) troubled past, so has been preserved graffiti scrawled by generations of defiant prisoners on the walls of the original buildings incorporated into the new Court. These formal references to the Reichstag – and the useful symbolic associations that they bring to bear on the Constitutional Court – are a reminder of the 'noteworthy modernity' that, as we have seen, is one of the ways in which national identity is propelled into the international arena in architectural terms. However, the symbolic coding of the Reichstag (and not least in the choice of the British architect Norman Foster as the author of the new buildings) attempts, as Delanty and Jones (2002: 458) put it, not to be "too particularistic, too rooted in a particular nation code." It thus embraces, they argue, a "contested, ambiguous identity that makes it representative of post-national sentiments and identity." The Constitutional Court, on the other hand, while embracing diversity as fundamental to its symbolic coding, is quite unambiguous in terms of the extent to which these notions of 'transparency' and 'rebuilding' reinforce ideas of nation building, firmly rooted in the politics of a 'particular nation code'. The most symbolically significant elements of this

[6] The Fort was built in 1899 by the government of Paul Kruger's Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek as a bastion against the British. Designed by Kruger's architect of choice, Sytze Wierda, the Fort never played a significant military role, and after the South African War it was used as a prison. Amongst its illustrious inmates were a number of anti-apartheid activists, including Mahatma Gandhi, Chief Albert Luthuli, Bram Fischer and Nelson Mandela. It still housed prisoners as late as 1983.

'rebuilding' in the Constitutional Court are to be seen in the 'Great African Steps' (figure 144), a walkway built with red bricks salvaged from the demolished Awaiting-Trial Prison, and which divides the new building from the old Women's Gaol. The same bricks have also been dry-packed in the main courtroom behind the judges' dais.

As with the Northern Cape Legislature, it was important from the outset that the court buildings should express symbolically a uniquely South African sensibility, without resorting either to established models from the developed world, or to patronising evocations of 'Africa'. As Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs – the indefatigable driving force behind much of the building's decorative programme and its most vociferous champion – puts it:

> We didn't want blindfolded women, the scales of justice. We have a culture of dispute resolution; we don't have to replicate other courts … [thus we wanted] … an imaginative new building that had to compete in the public imagination with the Union Buildings and Parliament. It needed to represent our age and not be a copy of a past age, or a building imported from elsewhere. It is a building and a nation for everyone (Sachs, 2004).[7]

The decorative elements on the façade engage this idea abundantly. The eight-metre high entrance doors bear the carved numbers one to twenty seven and carvings in sign languages of each of the twenty-seven basic human rights enshrined in the constitution (figures 145 and 146). These rights are repeated in etchings on glass by various artists placed along the western length of the building; above the entrance inside the building each judge has engraved in his/her own writing the words 'dignity, freedom, equality' in one of South Africa's eleven official languages, with one in Braille. Thus, the decorative programme reiterates symbolically what the Constitution expressly states: the upholding of equality and dignity and the protection of individual expression, not least of minority voices. Inside the building, an extensive collection of artworks (some of them donated), mostly by South African artists working in a broad range of media and with diverse subject matter, reinforces the importance of the individual voice over the more conventional approach of a didactic mural programme.

The references to the local – that is, the 'African' – are implied rather than explicitly stated, and carry strong symbolic associations. Most significant

[7] Not all viewers agreed – at the opening of the Court the Anti-Privatisation Forum staged a demonstration, protesting "their belief that many South Africans were being denied the socio-economic rights guaranteed to them by the constitution" (Calland, 2004: 35).

amongst these is the stylised tree that informs both the design of the court's logo, as well as aspects of the structure itself (figures 147 and 148). This is based on a somewhat generalised interpretation of the Southern African tradition of dispensing justice from beneath a tree,[8] but has nonetheless become one of the most potent signifiers of place. As Alan Lipman (2004: 11) puts it, "[it is a] specifically local reference that is at least as apposite as the familiar scales held in a blindfolded, non-partisan symbolic representation." Structurally a 'forest' of angled piers in the entrance hall reinforces this idea, their shaded green and brown mosaic cladding evoking a sense of bark and foliage (figure 149 and figure 150). Wooden benches, stools fashioned from tree stumps, and ceiling lights fashioned from wire by artist Walter Oltmann to look like leaves complete the effect (figure 150). In the courtroom the mottled shapes of the carpet also suggests dappled light under a tree, while formally echoing the cowhides – perhaps the most explicit reference to 'Africa' – that decorate the judges' dais, and that put an unequivocally local stamp on the court and its deliberations.

Thus, while this project may at some level be informed by a sense of a civil religion – in a democratic, secular state the constitution is, after all, the highest moral authority – it nonetheless aims at striking a fine and optimistic balance between memorialisation and constructive social intervention. This is due in no small part to the building's location on a ridge separating the densely populated, predominantly black area of Hillbrow from bureaucratic Braamfontein with its Civic Centre, and commanding a view of the predominantly white Northern Suburbs. The project is thus conceived as part of a larger context of social development and urban renewal in the city of Johannesburg, and, as such, it aims to be an accessible point for heritage, tourism and culture, rather than a self-conscious and self-reflexive symbol of nationalistic endeavour *per se*.

Notwithstanding the avoidance, in its decorative programme, of either sombre didacticism or triumphal posturing, the Constitutional Court – like the Northern Cape Legislature – nonetheless still perpetuates the conventional fictions of nation building. Murray Edelman (1995: 83) describes these as "buildings that reinforce a belief that people's ties to a heroic past or a promising future are their important identities: that the immediate effects of their actions are trivial

[8] This metaphor is somewhat expediently adapted to the symbolism of the Court, as in the African traditions to which it refers it was only men, not women, who attended such councils.

compared to their historic mission." Furthermore, and despite its attempts at subdued regionalism and accessibility – what Albie Sachs describes as "a building that inserts itself in the African landscape, both physically, climatically and culturally" (O'Toole, 2004: 64) – the overriding characteristic is that of a middle-of-the-road post-modern structure that, but for aspects of the applied ornament, could be located anywhere in the industrialised world. In this context Sachs's elaborate claim that the building "will become a symbol of the transformation, a university of the people, a tribute to courage, resistance, the ability to overcome pain, a definition of idealism" (O'Toole, 2004: 70) rings rather hollow. In fact, it exposes the extent to which the project conforms to what has become, as Lawrence Vale trenchantly observes, one of the standard ways in which new regimes – especially those struggling to wrest themselves from an odious colonial past – assert their identity. "What is often built to buttress 'national identity'", he writes,

> is really about three other more basic needs: the need to re-assert the sub-national identity of the sponsoring regime by equating its own specific ethnic heritage with 'the national'; the need to extend international identity through staking some new claim to noteworthy modernity; and the need to develop the personal identity of the client or designer, who views any single building project as a highly individualised imprint of self (Vale, 1999: 396).

As we have seen, all three of these elements are present to a greater or lesser extent not only in the 1920s buildings discussed in previous chapters, but also in both the Northern Cape Legislature and the new Constitutional Court.

5.3 Unity then and now: the lessons of the 1930s

The rhetoric of 'unity in diversity' that underscores much of the decorative programme of both these buildings is, as I have shown in the preceding chapters, not entirely without precedent in the South African context. The cultural nationalism of the 1930s thus provides a compelling reference point against which to assess contemporary constructions of national unity in South Africa, not least in the extent to which this is expressed in terms of public art and architecture.

In the context of the 1930s, as we have seen, the rhetoric of unity was underscored by the change in South Africa's economic fortunes, which led to widespread urbanisation and industrialisation – in effect, the metropolitan character of South Africa's important cities was largely consolidated during this

decade. As was the case in the United States of the 1930s under Roosevelt's New Deal an exponential increase in urbanisation, coupled with the need to create employment, resulted in a number of large-scale public works projects – town and city halls, libraries, schools, post offices, and government buildings – being undertaken in South Africa's burgeoning towns and cities. And also like the public works projects in the United States, these new buildings provided a highly visible public platform for extolling the virtues of good government and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. This was most easily achieved by means of murals and other decorative elements, which often also constructed idealised versions of history that pointed unctuously, as I have discussed in relation to a number of examples, to both the inevitability and desirability of the political *status quo*. I have also shown, in Chapter 4, how corporate capitalism, which, then as now, was quick to realise on which side its political bread was buttered, followed suit, erecting monumental office blocks whose decorative programmes unashamedly conflated corporate and national identity.

We have seen how the decorative programmes of South Africa House, the Pretoria City Hall, and the Old Mutual Building in Cape Town represented both public and commercial responses (in architectural terms) to the question of a politically correct approach to an inclusive South Africanism. Jan Juta's didactic panels in the Pretoria City Hall are particularly telling in terms of the extent to which he constructs quasi-historical allegories in which the fates of the English, the Afrikaners and the 'native races' of South Africa are inextricably linked. His use of Smuts'ss pronouncement that "we are going to build up something new, and in what we shall bring to life, there will be much that comes from Old Dutch, and from English, and from the Native Races of South Africa" as a starting point for constructing an idyllic vision of South African prosperity and piety is particularly telling. As I have suggested, it effectively implies, in the tireless words of the election slogan of the African National Congress, a 1930s version of a 'better life for all'.

Similarly, the decorative programmes, discussed in Chapter 4, of the headquarters of the SANTAM/SANLAM and Old Mutual insurance companies in Cape Town construct, through a number of deft historical elisions and lacunae, the vision of an economically thriving and socially stable community, united in its diversity. Despite their slavish adherence, as we have seen, to their European

and American models, both buildings – and many others like them – also make a token acknowledgement of their African context in their inclusion of images of indigenous fauna and flora. In the case of the Old Mutual building, this is extended, by means of the nine gigantic sculpted heads, to the tribal 'types' of the subcontinent. Ultimately, these representations of the 'natives of the Union' seem to me to be little more than the politically incorrect distant cousins of the Northern Cape Legislature's "numerous and diverse … people of the region" (Northern Cape Legislature Website, 2003).

Of course, given the socio-political context of the time, this mythologizing of a united South Africa inevitably plays itself out, as I have shown, in terms of a privileged white oligarchy over the anonymous, disenfranchised black masses. In these terms, the 'two' (white) races of South Africa are imagined as essentially the same. While the Afrikaner cultural identity is foregrounded, English speakers are invited to identify in their pioneering spirit the proud (and profitable) heritage of their own colonial past. The 'native races' are in turn marginalised and silenced by the crushing sophisms of colonialism that construct them at best as the exotic, primitive Other, and at worst simply as a resource to be exploited.

The comparison, then, with the optimism and open-endedness of the decorative programmes of the Northern Cape Legislature and the Constitutional Court seems somewhat forced, even churlish. However, by aiming at inclusivity and a broad but nationalistically focused appeal these more recent projects unwittingly adopt similar tactics. Thus, while the accent may have changed, the language remains the same. Here are the same stereotyped notions of peace and prosperity (although brought up to date); the same unctuously virtuous citizens treating political rhetoric as Holy Writ; the same constructions of an heroic past; the same identification of indigenous types; the same implicit language of 'us' and an undefined but inevitable 'them'. After all, nationalism, as Dan O'Meara (1997) reminds us, "is just as much about the failure of alternative projects and identities as about success for the new identities and policies proclaimed by the interpreters."

5.4 Epilogue: the more things change …

I have been guided in the writing of this thesis by the notion that ornament on public buildings inevitably enters into complex debates around the beliefs and

perceptions that constitute citizens' real or imagined longing for the tangible proof of identity that is afforded by the notion of an inalienable sense of place. As I suggested in the Introduction, an awareness of the implicit politics of ornament can complicate our readings of the nature and function of public architecture by allowing for less reductive and more nuanced approaches to unpacking complicated arguments about ethnicity, autochthony, and the figuring of imaginary new 'publics' in pursuit of notions of national identity. These recent examples, positioned, as they are, as blank slates onto which the values of post-apartheid South Africa may be inscribed, provide an interesting case in point.

While the architectural solutions that these new buildings offer are fairly unremarkable, their decorative programmes are driven by the need to establish a rhetoric of 'community' (to the extent that they consistently engage community driven processes such as mosaic workshops, craft projects, *etc.* in their realisation). In this way, their decorative programmes enable a shift in the discourse of public architecture away from staid notions of civic decorum and conventionalised grandeur towards open-endedness, inclusivity, and a sense of a deliberate playing with the elements and expectations of the public *space* in relation to notions of individualised and personal *place*. This raises interesting questions not only around the notion of constructing, both literally and metaphorically, 'imagined communities' (to use Benedict Anderson's tireless phrase), but also the centrality of visual experience to urban experience in the construction of a postcolonial, urban identity.

This, however, is not entirely unproblematic. The ostensible 'normalising' of issues of race and identity that informs the decorative programme, particularly of the Northern Cape Legislature (but the same may well be said of the Constitutional Court) effectively presents a spectacle of benign nationalism rooted in 'the community.' This is, in turn, a manifestation of the kind of 'populist' nationalism that both Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm (1990) suggest is more 'genuine' since it (ostensibly) responds spontaneously to its political context rather than being manufactured by a cultural elite. However, exactly what defines and who speaks for this unproblematic community is, as Donald McNeill and Mark Tewdwr-Jones (2003: 739) note, a "key issue of hegemonic politics and the fact that these issues are themselves ideological is often ignored by both

politicians and media." This observation is amply borne out, as we have seen, both by the media and by political responses to both projects.

Benedict Anderson is instructive on this point in so far as he refuses, as David Carroll (2000: 119) points out, to "privilege other [*i.e.* 'authentic' ethnic, linguistic, geographic or tribal] forms of community as original or genuine … lived or directly experienced rather than imagined'. "In fact," writes Anderson,

> all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson 1983: 6).

The implication, therefore, that there is such a thing as a good, natural nationalism as opposed to a bad, manufactured nationalism is fundamentally flawed – by definition, nationalism is a highly subjective ideological construct and can only function in terms of exclusions, the 'us' and, in the absence of a clearly definable 'them', the 'not us'. In these terms, I tend to agree with Christoph Marx's assertion that cultural nationalist ideology is "inherently conformist and hence inimical to the pluralism implicit in the democratic project" (Marx, 2002: 50).

Secondly, both buildings, despite the very best of democratic intentions, still buy into somewhat dated and conventional (that is, 'first world') notions of the morally uplifting and didactic potential of public buildings. Extrapolating from Anitra Nettleton's (2003) enquiry into the form and function of monuments in post-colonial Africa one might well ask, then, 'can *public buildings* speak in African languages?' Both the Northern Cape Legislature's and the new Constitutional Court's answer to this seems to be 'yes', if given a grammar of whimsicality, eclectic regionalism, and open-endedness. I would argue, however, that while this new grammar may appeal to a broader audience, it also constitutes what Michael Billig (1995) has identified as "banal nationalism", or a nationalism that is neither obvious nor oppressive, and therefore more likely to lodge unnoticed in the collective unconscious. Of course Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism' refers to the way in which identity politics are reinforced in the stable, affluent, and ostensibly 'anational' societies of the developed world. However, I would nonetheless argue that, given globalisation and the accelerated rate of identification with 'first-world' social, cultural, and economic values, it is, *mutatis mutandis* equally applicable in post-apartheid South Africa.

On the surface of it, there is nothing wrong in this, particularly in view of South Africa's miraculously peaceful transition to democracy, and the resultant complexities of balancing ethnic with social identities, widespread poverty with free market capitalism, and Africanism with internationalism. Nonetheless, it is the very insidiousness of this banality that we should be mindful of. As Billig (1995: 175) reminds us, national identities are always rooted within powerful social structures, which "inevitably reproduce hegemonic relations of inequity." Given the accessible and odious examples both of Afrikaner nationalism and the propensity for African nation states to degenerate into one party dictatorships, I think that one may well conclude with Billig (1995: 177) that "if the future remains uncertain, we know the past history of nationalism. And that should be sufficient to encourage a habit of watchful suspicion."

In the final analysis, the lessons of the 1930s are clear: assumptions about cultural identity, no matter how inclusive, are never neutral, and imagined communities – and their representation in the visual arts – are never permanent (figure 151). Shelley, of course, makes this point trenchantly in his poem 'Ozymandias', and it is to him I give the final word:

> My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
> Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
> Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
> Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
> The lone and level sands stretch far away.

* * *

APPENDIX 1

Subjects suggested as appropriate for the decoration of South Africa House, May 1930

The following notes, extracted from the *Arrangements for the Services of South Africa House* (BaH/31/7), lists the kinds of subjects that the High Commissioner, Charles Te Water, ministers in General J.B.M. Hertzog's cabinet and officials from the Public Works Department considered appropriate for the planned symbolic treatment of the building. Since many of these themes were to be explored – in one way or another – in the decorative programmes of most South African public buildings for the next decade, this list provides an interesting insight into the construction of the South African historical imagination at its beginning. I have retained the punctuation of the original document.

27th May 1930

Details of the symbolic treatment: Subjects for sculptural treatment, mural paintings, and carvings: wall maps, etc.

The High Commissioner will assist the Architect in deciding upon the subjects and their treatment.

As a first contribution to the discussion, the following heads of subjects might be considered and elaborated or compressed:

a) The discovery of South Africa: - The Early Navigators, the Portuguese

b) The early Dutch period: The East India Company: - The contact with Holland on the one side and the Dutch East Indies on the other. The Huguenots. The van der Stels and their works. The Castle at Capetown – Groot Constantia – Vergelegen – Stellenbosch

c) The British occupation and Lady Anne Barnard's times.

d) The Great Trek

e) The Kaffir Wars and the Kaffir menace to Civilisation

f) Previous divisions of South Africa: - Cape Colony – Kaffraria – Natal – the hinterland – the Republics

g) The great missionaries: - Livingstone and Offutt.

h) The great hunters: - Gordon Cumming. Selous.

i) Bushman Paintings.

j) The lure of Gold and Diamonds: - the alluvian fields – Kimberley, Pilgrims Rest. The Witwatersrand.

k) The ideals of the men who wanted to federate South Africa: - George Grey – Brand – DeVilliers – Hofmeyr – Rhodes

l) The Jameson Raid. The Anglo-Boer War.

m) Peace and Union – 31st May 1910

n) The hope of a wider Union – Africa federated and a bulwark of the commonwealth of Nations, and in the van to free its peoples from all that enslaves the human spirit.

o) To express also somehow the sprit which has always possessed South Africa, i.e., the yearning for Freedom – the Spirit of high adventure – the facing of difficulties in order to overcome them – the hope for the future.

p) In connection with the above utilisation of South African artists and sculptors should be given every consideration.

q) The use of South African timbers, stone and marble has been discussed with the Architect and he will put up to the High Commissioner a schedule of suggestions for their utilisation in the new building.

APPENDIX 2

Concerning the whereabouts of Juta's *The Arrival of Governor Jan van Riebeeck, 1652*

In 1973, while on holiday in Cape Town, Jan Juta wrote to the then Director of the South African National Gallery, C. J. du Ry, enquiring after the fate of his painting *The Arrival of Governor van Riebeeck in Table Bay, 1652*. Although commissioned for, and installed in, South Africa House in 1934, the painting had been removed in 1935 due to a political furore sparked by its treatment of the subject (see Chapter 2 above). Du Ry replied as follows (AAD/1993/9: 1 November 1973):

> 1 November 1973
>
> Dear Mr. Juta
>
> On my return from a visit to South West Africa, I found your letter concerning the painting entitled "The Arrival of Governor van Riebeeck in Table Bay 1652."
>
> As this matter dates back many years, we had to go through the files and I regret to have to state that we found, to my surprise, that this painting was connected with the black pages of the history of our Gallery.
>
> The facts are as follows:-
>
> The painting was accepted as a presentation from the Union Government by the Board of Trustees on 22.8.1936, on condition that it would be stored and not exhibited.

In February 1947, with the consent of the Board of Trustees, the then Director of the Gallery, Prof. Roworth[1], sold the painting to a certain Mr. A. Krook (sic!), at that time a well-known Art Dealer in Johannesburg.

Since then the painting was sold by auction to an unrecorded person and trace of it was lost.

An official enquiry was ordered by the Government as to the legal rights of selling any objects belonging to the collections of the National Gallery.

The official outcome of this enquiry is unknown to me. It could possibly be traced in the magistrate's archives, but I am afraid one has no access to them.

I feel very unhappy that I have to disclose these rather sordid facts of the past.

The only way, I presume, to find out where the painting now is, is to ask the Everite Company – they apparently traced the painting so as to make a reproduction of it. I am afraid, this is the only advice I can offer in this unfortunate matter.

I remain, Sir,

Yours sincerely.

[1] In the 1930s the notoriously conservative Edward Roworth (1880 – 1964), in his capacity then as the President of the South African Academy of Painters, had complained to Charles Te Water about the choice of artists – particularly Gwelo Goodman – for the decoration of South Africa House. Instead, he proposed himself, with Minister of Finance Claas Havenga's authority, to paint another room. However, as Baker (BaH/31/5: 13 November 1933) put it, "the High Commissioner agreed that his was for his selfish benefit and not for the advancement of S.A. artists in general. The High Commissioner had cabled to Havenga that he could not accept Rowarth's [*sic*] pictures, and he admitted that Havenga was wrong in authorizing Goodman's pictures."

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Architect, Builder, and Engineer (1918 – 1939)

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1 Emley and Williamson and Williamson and N. T. Cowin, The portico (above) and interior (below) of the Great Hall at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. 1922 (1936). After the building was damaged by an extensive fire in 1931, the interior was remodelled by Williamson and N. T. Cowin and completed in 1936. The stylistic disparity between the atavistic façade, an archaeological restatement of its classical sources, and the clean-limned Modern Movement interior thus bring into sharp relief that tensions between 'tradition' and 'modernity' both at the University's School of Architecture, as well as in the broader architectural rubric of the day.

Figure 2 Obel and Obel. Astor Mansions, Johannesburg. 1932. One of the most flamboyant examples of New York-style 'skyscraper' architecture in Johannesburg, Astor Mansions is an interesting case study in the genealogy of 'modernistic' styling in Johannesburg architecture of the 1930s. This is made particularly apparent in the disparities between the architects' original drawing (figure 3 below) published in 1931, and the completed building. All references to the beaux arts conventions that characterise the initial concept are replaced in the extant structure by self-consciously modern elements obviously borrowed from contemporary examples in the United States – not least the metal panels at the top of the tower (figure 4 below) that, like the stainless-steel cladding of the Van Alen's Chrysler Building in New York (1928 – 30), would reflect light during the day and be illuminated by night. (Photo: Allan Yates, in Cumming-George, 1933: 50)

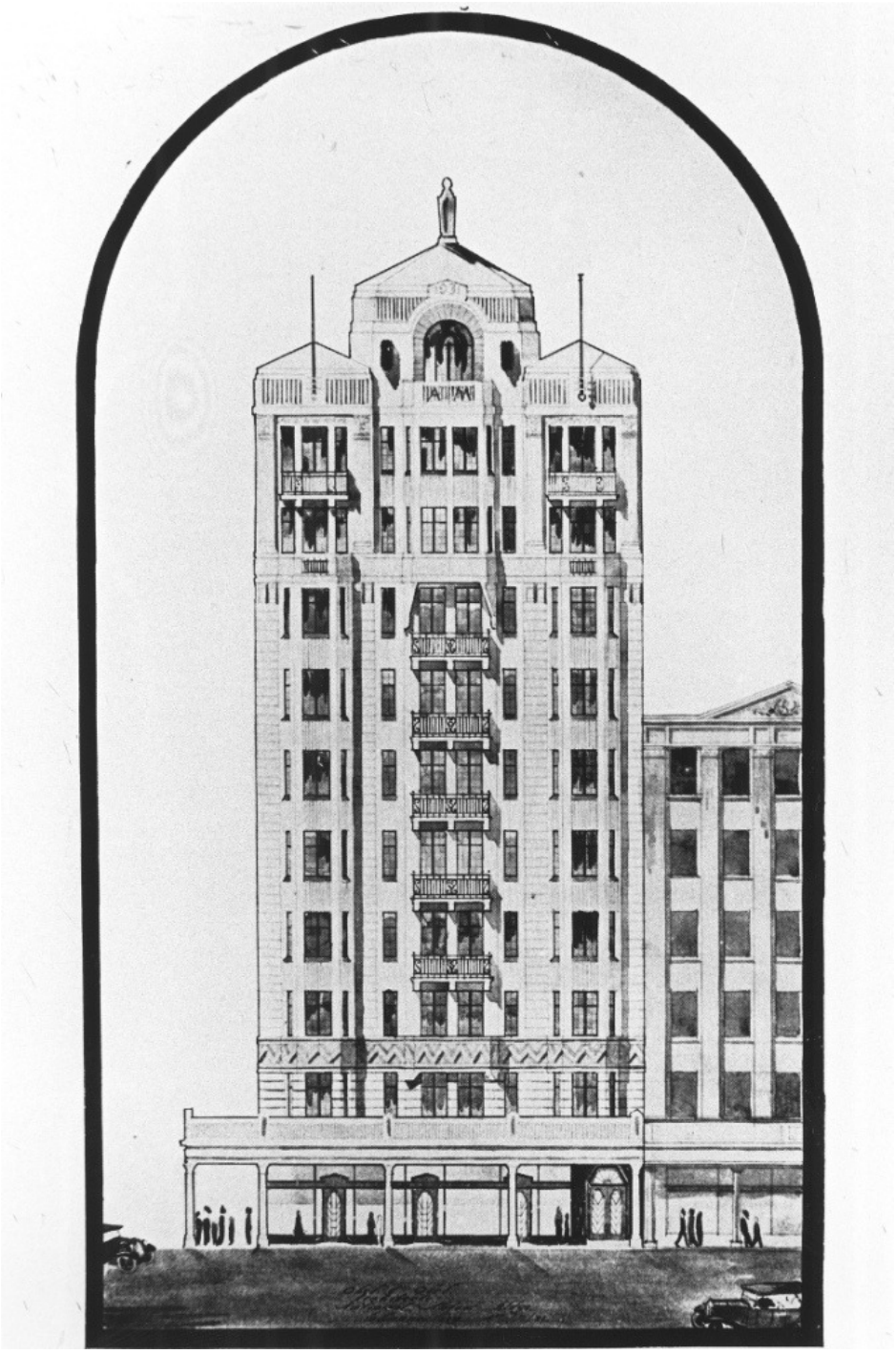

Figure 3 Obel and Obel. Architects' drawing for Astor Mansions. 1931. In terms of its original conception, Astor Mansions would not have departed significantly from the beaux arts conventions that characterised South African urban architecture in the 1920s. The symmetry of the elongated façade, the strong sense of frontality, and the overriding classical 'feel' all conform to the stylistic conventions of the 1920s. However, two relatively unobtrusive elements show the emergence of an altering sensibility: first, the inclusion of a zigzag decorative band at second floor level, and second the two lightning conductors (or flagpoles) – each supported by three parallel rings more reminiscent of streamlined machine parts than of the stock vocabulary of classicism – attached to the top of the towers (Source: *South African Builder*, August 1931: 23).

Figure 4 Obel and Obel. Astor Mansions, Johannesburg. 1932. Detail of the upper floors, showing the aluminium nameplate detail on the north tower. These panels would reflect light during the day, and at night be illuminated from behind by means of the light from the rooms situated there. This is significant in as far as it evokes echoes of New York's Chrysler Building (1928 – 30), and thus self-consciously proclaims a glamorously 'modern' point of reference for South Africa's burgeoning skyscraper metropolis.

Figure 5 King George V and Queen Mary, accompanied by Jan Smuts, arrive for the official opening of South Africa House, 22 June 1933. Jan Smuts had travelled with the King and Queen from Buckingham Palace as Minister in Attendance, an honour previously not bestowed on any dominion politician. This must be interpreted not only as a token of the high esteem in which Smuts was held internationally, but also as indicative of the centrist (that is, pro-imperialist) shift that was taking place in South African politics at the time. (Photo: *South African Builder*, June 1933: 13.)

Figure 6 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, main entrance, Trafalgar Square, London. 1933. Baker's original design for South Africa House was in keeping with the essentially domestic, Cape Dutch-inspired architecture that he had pioneered at Rhodes' Cape Town residence, Groote Schuur, and which was to become the most salient characteristic of his work in South Africa. He thus intended originally to have an attic tiled roof dominated by a gable (inset), which would reinforce the notions of the metaphorical 'home' of the dominion in the literal 'home' of the metropole. The city's Fine Arts Commission, however, felt that this would be out of keeping with the neoclassical character of Trafalgar Square, and he was thus enjoined to design the building with a balustraded, flat-roofed attic, with an inset pediment supported by two Ionic columns in place of the gable. (Inset photo: Baker, 1944: 136.)

Figure 7 A stinkwood and marble table, custom-made to Baker's design, in the foyer of South Africa House. The insets show symbolic depictions, reiterated throughout the building, of the Southern Cross and an anchor inlaid on the tabletop in indigenous marbles and South African semi-precious stones. On the wall behind the table is a tapestry, donated by Sir Abe Bailey. Designed by Eric Gill and woven by the Morris looms at Merton Abbey, it is a romanticised map of the African subcontinent that highlights, in its decorative elements, the impact on the region of European colonisation.

Figure 8 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. Details of animal sculptures on the façade. Symbolic representations of indigenous fauna and flora appear everywhere on the façade. The keystones on the arched windows are carved with mimosa, protea and crinum, while the sill brackets are carved with elephant, wildebeest, lion and antelope. These decorations were carved in Portland stone by Joseph Armitage (1880 – 1945) to the designs of Sir Charles Wheeler RA (1892 – 1974).

Figure 9 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. Interior and exterior details of protea motifs. Stylised proteas appear throughout the building, starting with the gates outside the entrance and continuing in the plasterwork and balustrades in the interior (insets).

Figure 10 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. Winged springbok. Based on the design of a winged oryx in the Louvre, the winged springbok – modelled and cast in bronze by Charles Wheeler to Baker's design – was the architect's answer to the need to find "some general symbol that would typify South Africa more vividly than the emblem of the Protea" (Baker, 1944: 133).

Figure 11 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. Details of winged springbok motifs. The winged springbok is a recurrent motif throughout the building, as here, in the centre of the proscenium arch of the Kinema's stage, and on the balusters (inset).

Figure 12 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. The portico above the Trafalgar Square entrance. The Corinthian portico features a springbok with sun-disc in its horns on the keystone above the entrance arch, with the Union coat of arms and the Southern Cross intertwined with an anchor further up on the wall. The somewhat incongruous 'Cape Dutch' treatment of the fanlight and '*holbol'* scrollwork above it, is typical of Baker's 'Cape Dutch-Mediterranean' style; a hybrid that – like his Mughal-inspired architecture in New Delhi – sought to infuse the 'eternal and timeless' principles of Classical architecture with a sense of the indigenous character of the colony.

Figure 13 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. The pedimented balcony above the portico. Despite having been reliably informed by Dutch historians that Jan van Riebeeck travelled to the Cape on the *Dromedaris*, Baker persisted – for reasons that have more to do with his own imperialist fancy than historical accuracy – that *Goede Hoop* was the name of the ship on which he travelled. Here, in the pediment, it serves as a collective symbol of the conquest of the Cape by early European seafarers.

Figure 14 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, Niche on the Trafalgar Square façade, London. 1933. The stone niche at the Trafalgar Square corner contains Coert Steynberg's sculpture of Bartholomeu Dias. Both Hertzog and Smuts would have preferred a sculpture of Jan van Riebeeck here, but Baker insisted that "the first European to sight South Africa" (*South Africa House*, n.d.: 4) had the historical edge on the first Dutch governor. Although no known portrait of Dias exists, Steynberg was at pains to present a certain amount of historical exactitude. The costume is taken from fifteenth century paintings by Nimo Gonsalves, and the caravel is of the same type Dias would have used on his voyage to the Cape. His hand rests on a cross of the type set up by Portuguese navigators around the African coast.

Figure 15 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. Domes in the entrance hall. The two domes in the entrance hall, like the twin towers of the Union Buildings, symbolise the union of the Boer republics and the British colonies.

Figure 16 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. Medallions decorating the dome outside the Kinema. Baker adopted, modified, or invented a number of symbolic and heraldic devices to celebrate the civilising mission of the European conquest of the African continent. These escutcheons, which decorate the dome outside the downstairs Kinema, for example, symbolise the quest of the sea (top left); Portuguese navigators' wheels and crosses (top right); the quest of the land in a symbolic depiction of the 'Mountains of the Moon and the Source of the Nile' – a reference to early Trekkers who believed that at Nylstroom they had found the source of the Nile – with a Bible, rifle and powder horn, and ox wagon (bottom left); and a Dutch sailing ship. The same escutcheons also appear elsewhere in the building, especially in important public thresholds, including the library.

Figure 17 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. Detail of 'native races' escutcheon. Baker gave the 'native races' a token acknowledgement in the form of an escutcheon featuring a beehive hut surmounted by two crossed assegais and shields. Although this example is from the Kinema, this escutcheon also appears in other important public rooms.

Figure 18 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. The *Voorhuis* – a mock Cape Dutch reception room with ersatz finishes designed by Baker – as it appeared in 1933. This room served originally as the travel bureau (photo: *The South African Builder*, July 1933: 17).

Figure 19 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. The ante-room to the Library and *Voorhuis*, showing Gwelo Goodman's murals depicting Cape landscapes and flowers.

Figure 20 Gwelo Goodman. *Cape Landscape*. 1933. Mural (oil on panel), approximately 140 x 140 cm. South Africa House, London. Much to Baker's chagrin, Gwelo Goodman was commissioned by the South African government to produce a series of paintings for South Africa House. Baker exerted his influence both in terms of the choice of subject and in their placement: an ante-room between the *Voorhuis* and the reading room, a space where visitors would be unlikely to tarry long.

Figure 21 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. The walls of the gallery above the Exhibition Hall, with mural panels by J. H. Pierneef.

Figure 22 J. H. Pierneef. *Constantia Nek and Valley Cape* and *A Gold Mine Witwatersrand.* 1934. Mural (oil on canvas). South Africa House, London. In a virtual restatement of the paintings he completed for the Johannesburg Park Station in 1932, Pierneef painted a series of murals depicting various scenic locations in South Africa for the gallery above the exhibition hall.

Figure 23 Herbert Baker. The Exhibition Hall as it appeared in 1933, South Africa House, London. 1933. The empty frames in which the Pierneef panels were installed soon afterwards are clearly visible on the gallery. (Source: *The South African Builder*, November 1933: 29).

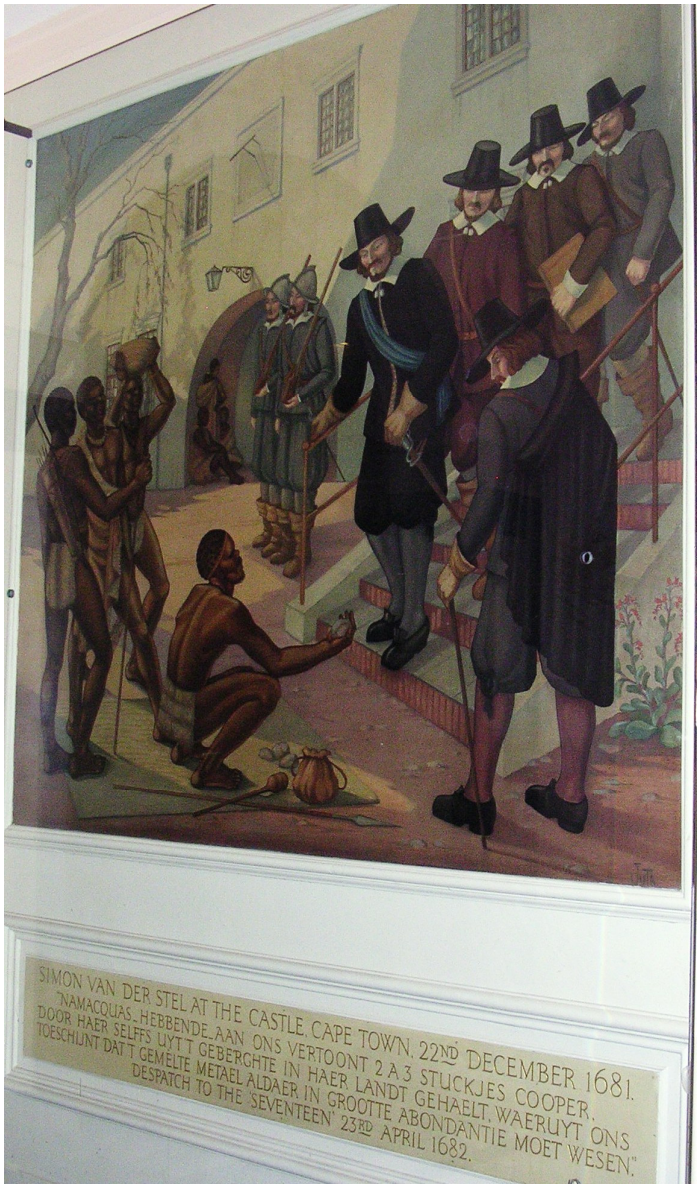

Figure 24 Jan Juta. *Simon van der Stel at the Castle, Cape Town.* 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 150 x 58 cm. South Africa House, London. After the removal of the controversial the *Landing of Jan van Riebeeck* panel (see figure 25 below), Juta was requested to produce another work dealing with the Dutch colonisation of the Cape as a companion piece to the panel depicting *Willem Adriaan Van der Stel on his Farm Vergelegen* (see figure 26 below). This scene, based on a report from van der Stel to the 'Seventeen', depicts an incident in which Namaquas brought pieces of copper to barter with the colonists, and from which Van der Stel concluded that 'there must be an abundance of that metal' in the region. By the uneasy logic of colonialism, this scene then serves to represent the mineral wealth of South Africa.

Figure 25 Jan Juta. *The Landing of Jan van Riebeeck*. 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 150 x 58 cm. Location unknown. Juta originally intended this panel to be the first of two dealing with the Dutch settlers. After pressure from Afrikaner nationalist circles, who felt that this representation encouraged the view that Van Riebeeck was a Catholic – and thus ran counter to the (historically somewhat suspect) view that part of Van Riebeeck's mission to the Cape was to create a safe haven for European protestants fleeing the religious wars – the painting was removed. The panels dealing with Van Riebeeck that were finally installed studiously avoid any overt religious references (see figures 31 and 32 below). (Source: *Fortune*, May 1935: 75).

Figure 26 Jan Juta. *Willem Adriaan Van der Stel on his Farm, Vergelegen*. 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), 150 x 262 cm. South Africa House, London. Both scenes emphasise the acquisition of wealth through mining and agriculture, with emphasis on the extent to which this was seen as the natural prerogative of the colonists.

Figure 27 Jan Juta. *1652* (left) and *1700* (right). 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), 150 x 58 cm. South Africa House, London. Separating the two 'Van der Stel' paintings are two panels "devoted to native life" (South Africa House, n.d.: 20). The image on the left represents 'native life' "as found by the Dutch settlers" and the one on the right the 'natives' "as developed under Christian and governmental teaching" (South Africa House, n.d.: 20).

Figure 28 Jan Juta. *The Voortrekkers*. 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), 150 x 58 cm. South Africa House, London. Further along on the gallery wall are two paintings celebrating the intrepid, pioneering spirit of the 'two races' of South Africa, in which both constituencies are recognised as having a legitimate claim to the land. This painting on the theme of the Great Trek, quoting the Trek leader Piet Retief, is captioned "we decided, that wherever we may go, we will uphold the principles of fairness and freedom" (my translation).

Figure 29 Jan Juta. *The Landing of the British Settlers 1820*. 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), 150 x 58 cm. South Africa House, London. Juta's painting on the theme of the 1820 settlers is captioned with a quotation by Lord Somerset: "To organise colonisation, which by spreading over a fine and fertile country shall be strong enough to support itself".

Figure 30 Herbert Baker. South Africa House, London. 1933. View from the Entrance Hall up to the High Commissioner's office. Positioned on either side of the door to the High Commissioner's office are paintings that celebrate the European conquest of the African subcontinent. On the left is J. H. Amshewitz's *Vasco da Gama*, one of three panels dealing with the Portuguese 'voyages of discovery' and on the right, one of three panels by Jan Juta dealing with Jan van Riebeeck's landing at the Cape.

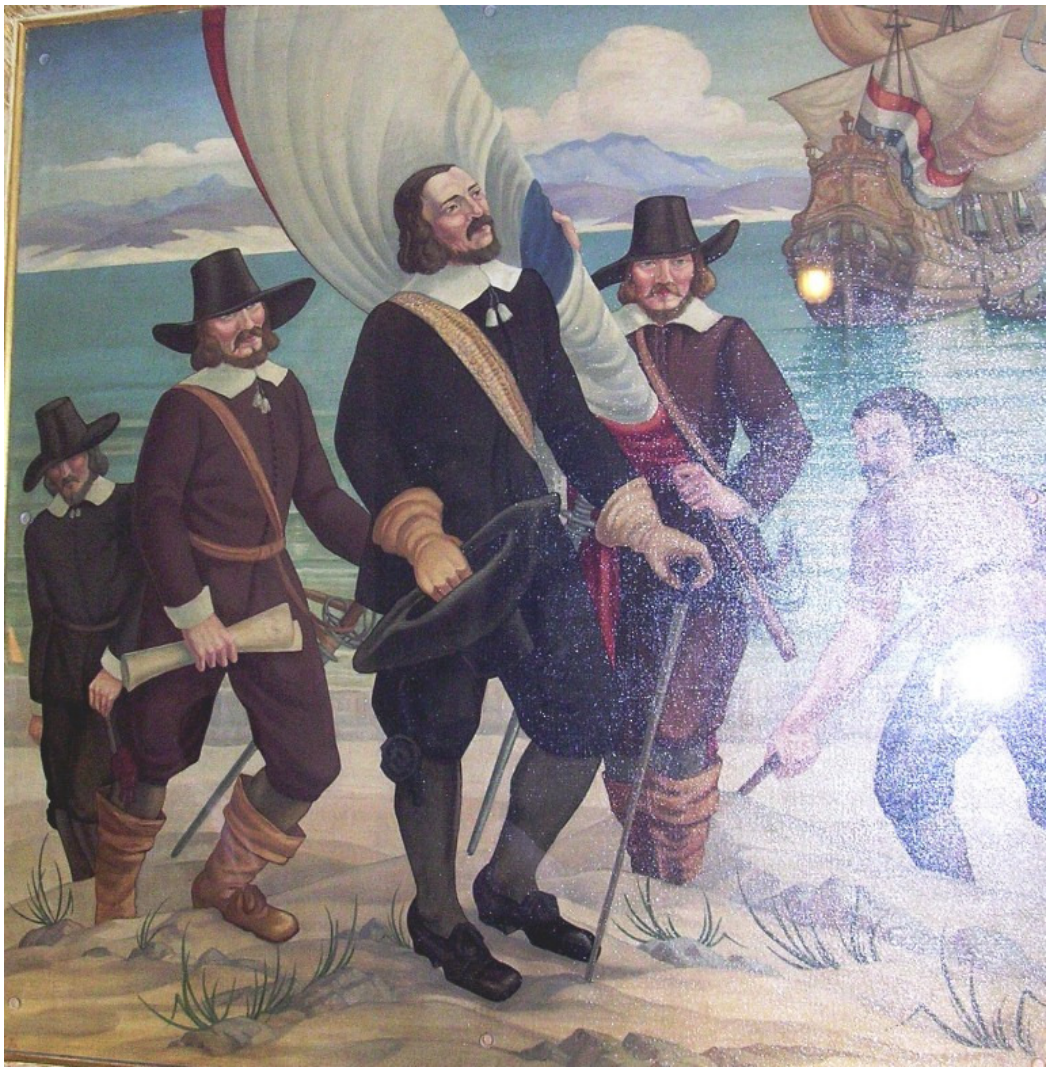

Figure 31 Jan Juta. *The Landing of Jan van Riebeeck*. 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), 150 x 262 cm. South Africa House, London. Following the controversy surrounding his first painting of Jan van Riebeeck's landing (see figure 25 above), and in response to increasing criticism from the Afrikaner press regarding the preponderance of symbolic and other imagery in South Africa House dealing with the Portuguese seafarers, Te Water commissioned Jan Juta to produce three further panels on the theme of Van Riebeeck's landing. The panels are placed outside the High Commissioner's office, next to three paintings by Amshewitz depicting Prince Henry the Navigator, Bartholomeu Dias, and Vasco da Gama. In this way both Baker – who viewed the Portuguese seafarers and Dias in particular as the 'Christopher Columbus' of Africa – and the Afrikaner nationalists – who complained that their Dutch ancestry was being ignored – could be mollified.

Figure 32 Jan Juta. *The Landing of Jan van Riebeeck*. 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), 150 x 262 cm. South Africa House, London.

Figure 33 John Tweed. *The Landing of Van Riebeeck* (detail). 1933. Plaster, approximately 150 x 60 cm. South Africa House, London. A detail of the plaster copy of John Tweed's sculpture of Van Riebeeck's landing – the bronze original of which is on the gable above the entrance of Rhodes' Cape Town mansion Groote Schuur – that graces the wall of a small waiting space adjacent to the High Commissioner's office.

Figure 34 J. H. Amshewitz. *Prince Henry the Navigator*. 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 183 x 122 cm. South Africa House, London. One of Amshewitz's key patrons during the 1930s was the Johannesburg business mogul Michael Haskel, a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant and ardent Zionist who served as the Union's Honorary Commissioner for the Union of South Africa in Palestine from 1933 to 1938. Although Baker had serious misgivings about Amshewitz's work (he wrote to the High Commissioner that Amshewitz's paintings left him with "the unpleasant taste of a second rate Victorian drawing-room" (BaH 31/5: 1 December 1933)), he had no choice but to acquiesce to Te Water's acceptance of Haskel's generous sponsorship of this commission from Amshewitz.

Figure 35 J. H. Amshewitz. *Bartholomew Dias on the Point of Departure from Lisbon*. 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 244 x 152 cm. South Africa House, London. As we have seen, Baker vociferously championed the idea of paying tribute to the Portuguese seafarers who had 'discovered' South Africa in the same way that Columbus had 'discovered' America. However, he had no time for Amshewitz, or the latter's interpretation of his 'hero', Bartholomew Dias. When Baker first saw this work, he wrote in confidence to the High Commissioner, "the figure of the Queen is unpleasantly over painted (this really bad) and that of John of Portugal (this less important and not so bad), who was a fine figure, stands in the background with the face almost of a black man" (BaH 31/5: 1 December 1933).

Figure 36 J. H. Amshewitz. *Vasco da Gama Sighting the Cape of Good Hope*. 1934. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 183 x 122 cm. South Africa House, London.

Figure 37 Herbert Baker. The 'Zulu Room' at South Africa House, London. 1933. A general view of the Zulu Room, a small lobby adjacent to the Prime Minister's offices, showing the extent of the fresco programme painted by Eleanor Esmonde-White and Le Roux Smith Le Roux (1938).

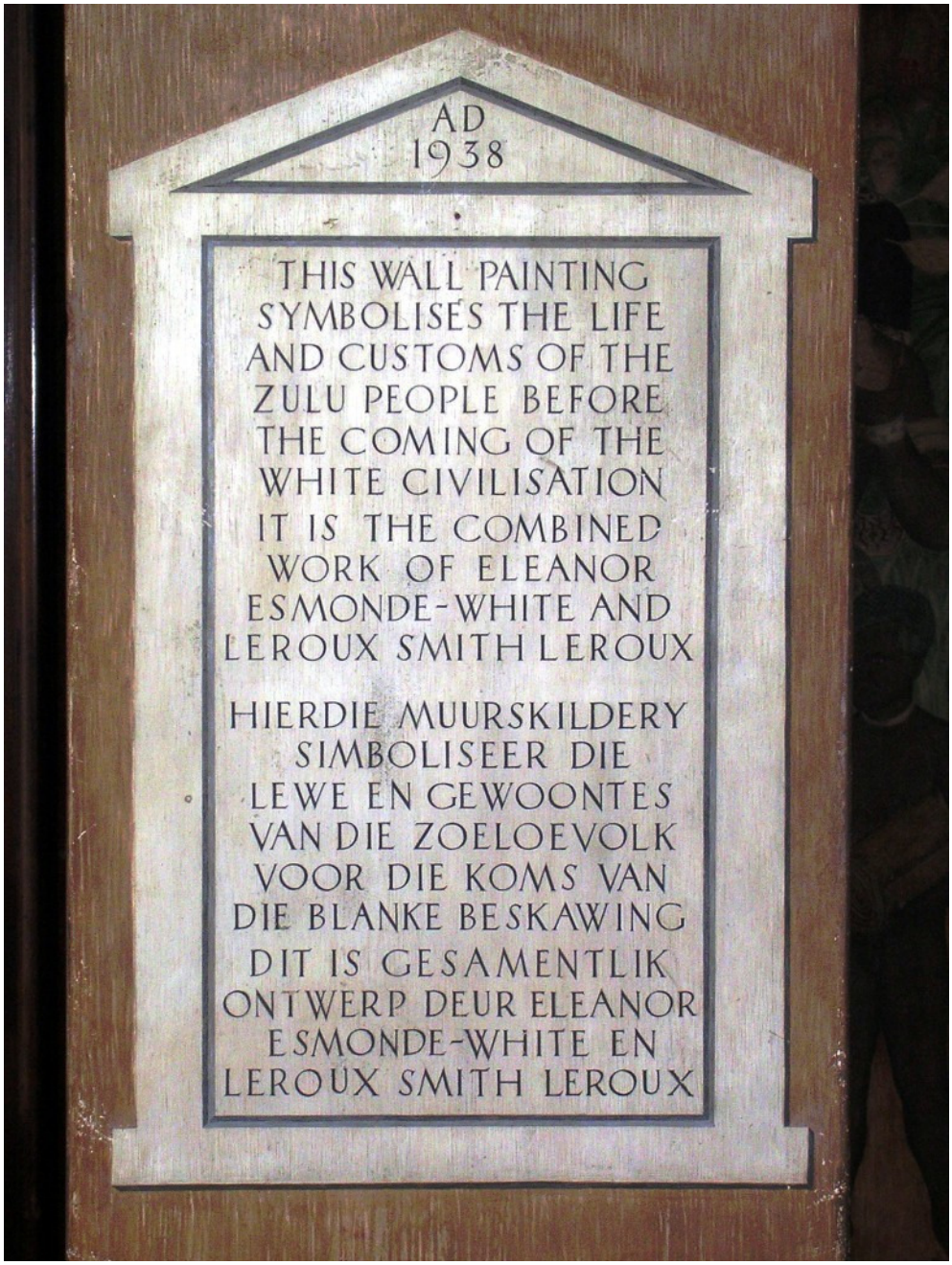

Figure 38 Eleanor Esmonde-White and Le Roux Smith Le Roux. Detail of mural in the 'Zulu Room'. 1938. Fresco, dimensions variable. South Africa House, London. The unfortunately-worded, painted plaque in the Zulu Room.

Figure 39 Eleanor Esmonde-White and Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *The Feast of the First Fruits* (detail of mural in the 'Zulu Room'). 1938. Fresco, dimensions variable. South Africa House, London. A detail of the 'Feast of the First Fruits' showing King Shaka surrounded by his counsellors and bodyguards, with a witchdoctor in attendance.

Figure 40 Eleanor Esmonde-White and Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Zulu Wedding Ceremony* (detail of mural in the 'Zulu Room'). 1938. Fresco, dimensions variable. South Africa House, London. A depiction of a wedding ceremony, presided over by an elaborately costumed female witchdoctor, with the bride being prepared for a ceremonial bath in the background.

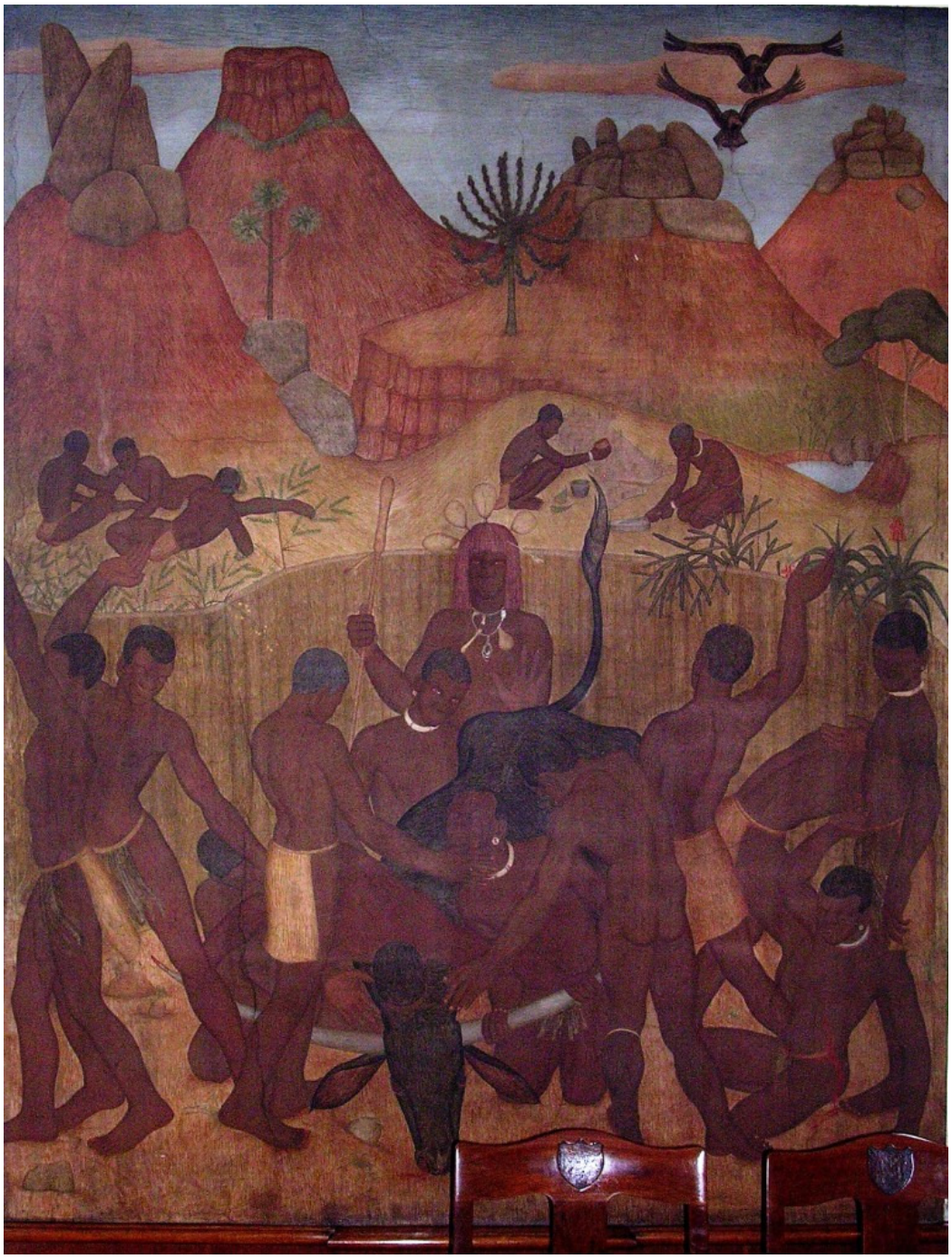

Figure 41 Eleanor Esmonde-White and Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Slaughtering a Black Bull* (detail of mural in the 'Zulu Room'). 1938. Fresco, dimensions variable. South Africa House, London. In this panel a group of unarmed youths slaughter a black bull.

Figure 42 Eleanor Esmonde-White and Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Zulu Village* (detail of mural in the 'Zulu Room'). 1938. Fresco, dimensions variable. South Africa House, London. Zulu life 'before the coming of the white civilisation' presented as a prelapsarian, pastoral idyll.

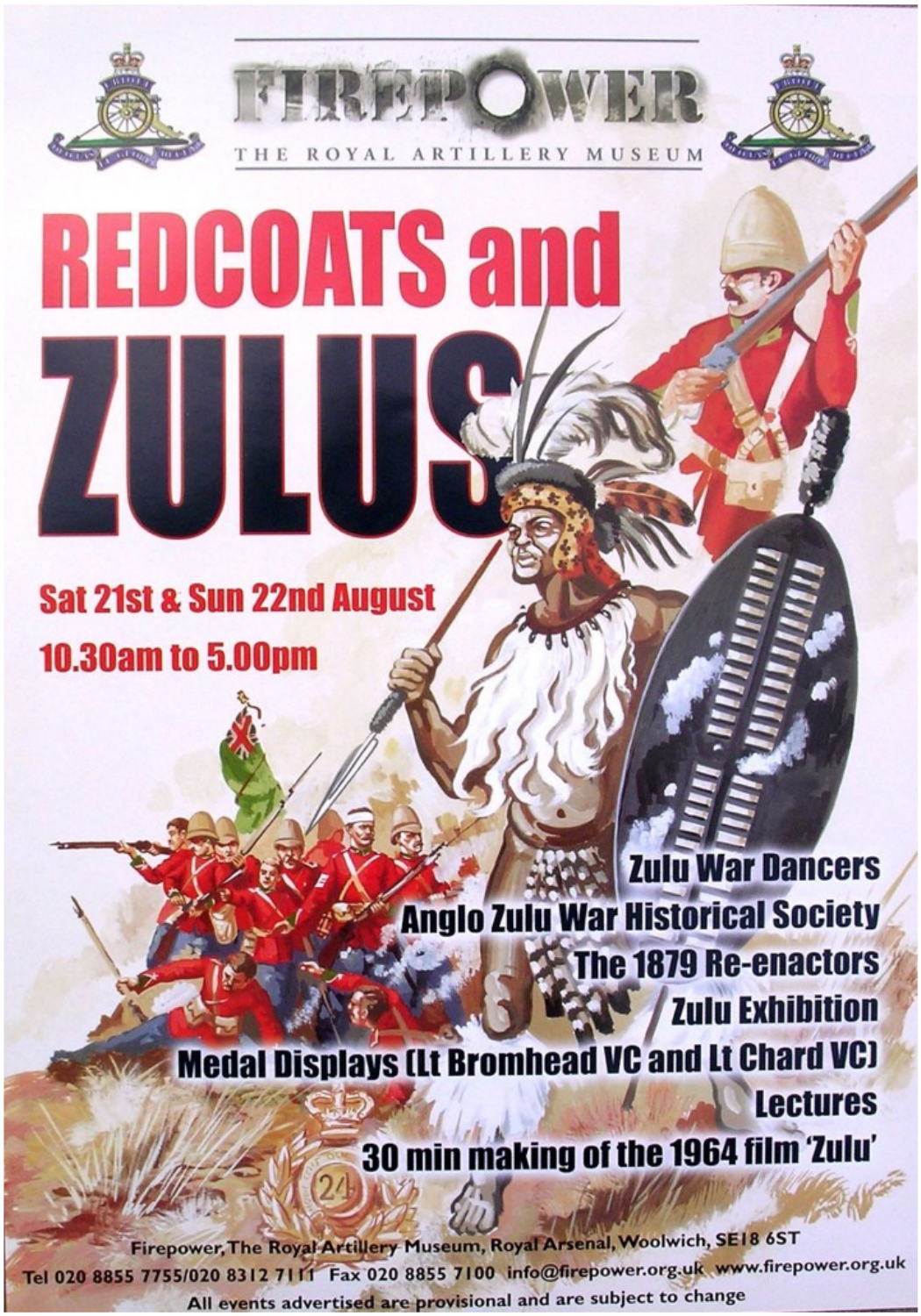

Figure 43 Artist Unknown. Advertising pamphlet, Royal Artillery Museum. 2004. London. A flyer from the Royal Artillery Museum advertising a mini-extravaganza entitled 'Redcoats and Zulus'. This flyer was taken from the public foyer of South Africa House in August 2004, and reminds us of the persistence of constructions of the exotic Other in the European imagination.

Figure 44 Thick sheets of glass have been placed in front of all the wall paintings (with the exception – due largely to their inaccessibility high on the walls above the Exhibition Hall – of the Pierneefs). In time these glass panels will be inscribed with semi-transparent artworks by contemporary South African artists (proposals were received from, *inter alia*, Senzeni Marasela, Berni Searle, and Sue Williamson) in order to "contextualise the existing symbols and functions by way of increased transparency and layered portals bridging past, present and future" (De Smidt, 2000: 3).

Figure 45 J. H. Amshewtiz. *Onward*. 1937. Mural (oil on canvas), 366 x 264 cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria. This painting, which still occupies pride of place in the foyer of the Pretoria City Hall, was also commissioned from Amshewitz by Michael Haskel.

Figure 46 J. Lockwood Hall. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria. 1935. An eclectic mix of classicism, restrained art deco, and a hint of Lutyens' imperial architecture at New Delhi, Lockwood Hall's building aims at a kind of monumental neutrality; what Doreen Greig describes as, "an example of how prissy neo-Classicism could become when it was felt necessary to introduce some reticence to keep up with … the 20th century … with just enough 'classical' paraphernalia to keep a foot in both camps" (Greig, 1971)

Figure 47 J. H. Amshewitz. *Onward.* 1937. Mural (oil on canvas), 366 x 264 cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria. The standing male figure's resemblance to a young Jan Smuts was a deliberate choice on the artist's part. Amshewitz felt that the "noble strength of Smuts'ss countenance" (Amshewitz, 1951: 27) best symbolised the Voortrekker 'type'. In retrospect, Smuts's presence in this work – no matter how diluted – may be seen to resonate powerfully with the ideology of fusion politics that informs the decorative programme of the building as a whole.

Figure 48 J. H. Amshewitz. *Onward* (detail). 1937. Mural (oil on canvas), Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria. According to his wife and biographer, Sarah Briana Amshewitz (1951: 27), Amshewitz believed that "the women played a more heroic part [in the Trek] than the men." In keeping with the tropes of violence and savagery that were increasingly being evoked in order to legitimate the Great Trek as the signal act of Afrikaner nationalism (see Hofmeyr 1987 and 1988), Amshewitz's *volksmoeder* is thus not a woman to be trifled with. While cradling a baby in one arm she hands a pistol to a boy, already holding a rifle, kneeling before her.

Figure 49 P. A. Hendriks. Untitled. 1937. Mural (oil on canvas) approximately 175cm x 150cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria. Elaborating a theme that he had first explored in a series of murals for the new General Post Office in Johannesburg (1935), Hendriks conflates aspects of 'civilisation' and 'culture' with quasi-allegorical female figures clad in indeterminate 'period' dress.

Figure 50 P. A. Hendriks. Untitled. 1935. Murals (oil on canvas) both approximately 175cm x 150cm. General Post Office, Johannesburg. The subject matter and style Hendriks' murals for the Pretoria City Hall borrow heavily from those that he completed for the Johannesburg Post Office in 1935. While the murals that he painted for the canteen (figure 52 below), with its depiction of musicians in a stylised 'Boland' setting seems similarly concerned with conflating notions of the Cape with culture and civilisation, these murals, prominently placed above the counters in the main hall of the post office, are allegorical depictions of the bounty of the various regions of the Union – in this case Cape sheep farming(above) and Free State agriculture (below). (Photo: Jillian Carman, 2005)

Figure 51 P. A. Hendriks. Untitled. 1935. Murals (oil on canvas) both approximately 175cm x 150cm. General Post Office, Johannesburg. Unlike the Pretoria City Hall murals, which construct their allegories of learning and civilisation around female figures, two of the five panels in the main hall of the Johannesburg Post Office feature men. A bearded *Voortrekker* patriarch (above), proudly displaying a rifle and powder horn, tames the wildness of the hinterland, while a young male figure kneels (below), as if in supplication, before the economic miracle that is Johannesburg, City of Gold. A black miner, holding a pickaxe, watches at a respectful distance. (Photo: Jillian Carman, 2005)

Figure 52 P. A. Hendriks. Untitled. 1935. Detail of mural (oil on canvas), approximately 800cm x 100cm. General Post Office, Johannesburg. Like the Pretoria City Hall murals, Hendriks' murals in the Post Office canteen conflate notions of culture and learning with an idealised evocation of the Cape. On the opposite wall a mural depicting Voortrekker Life by Erich Mayer provides a more ruggedly didactic counterpoint to this effete scene. (Photo: Jillian Carman, 2005)

Figure 53 P. A. Hendriks. Untitled. 1937. Mural (oil on canvas) approximately 175cm x 150cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 54 P. A. Hendriks. Untitled. 1937. Mural (oil on canvas) approximately 175cm x 150cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 55 P. A. Hendriks. Untitled. 1937. Mural (oil on canvas) approximately 175cm x 150cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

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Figure 57 P. A. Hendriks. Untitled. 1937. Mural (oil on canvas) approximately 175cm x 150cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 58 J. Lockwood Hall. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria. 1935. Stylised Cape Dutch elements in architecture.

Figure 59 J. Lockwood Hall. The Council Chamber, Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria. 1935. The Council Chamber, showing one of the two murals by Jan Juta.

Figure 60 Jan Juta. *Settlers presenting a Bible to Jacobus Uys*. 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 914cm x 335cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 61 Jan Juta. *Settlers presenting a Bible to Jacobus Uys* (detail). 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 914cm x 335cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 62 Jan Juta. *Settlers presenting a Bible to Jacobus Uys* (detail). 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 914cm x 335cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 63 Jan Juta. *Settlers presenting a Bible to Jacobus Uys* (detail). 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 914cm x 335cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 64 Jan Juta. *The Development of the Transvaal*. 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 914cm x 335cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 65 Jan Juta. *The Development of the Transvaal* (detail). 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 914cm x 335cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 66 Jan Juta. *The Development of the Transvaal* (detail). 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 914cm x 335cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 67 Jan Juta. *The Development of the Transvaal* (detail). 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 30' by 11'. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 68 Coert Steynberg. *The History of Pretoria*, tympanum frieze, Pretoria City Hall. 1935. Portland stone, dimensions variable. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 69 J. A. Moffatt and N. T. Duncan. Union Castle Building (detail of decorative panel), Johannesburg. 1937. One of a series of panels symbolising the Union Castle's commercial activities, this panel depicts 'industry', in which billowing smokestacks – what one might call 'iconic pollution' – are presented as signs of modernity and progress.

Figure 70 Jan Juta. *The Development of the Transvaal* (detail) 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 914cm x 335cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 71 Jan Juta. *The Development of the Transvaal* (detail). 1938. Mural (oil on canvas), approximately 914cm x 335cm. Pretoria City Hall, Pretoria.

Figure 72 Jan Juta. Stained glass window (detail). 1940. Anglo American Building, 44 Main Street, Johannesburg.

Figure 73 Louw and Louw. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg). 1932. Cape Town.

Figure 74 Louw and Louw. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg). 1932. Cape Town. Waal Street façade showing the pre-cast cement panels designed by M. Quail.

Figure 75 Louw and Louw. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg). 1932. Cape Town. Waal Street façade showing the pre-cast cement panels designed by M. Quail.

Figure 76 M. Quail. *Trust*. 1932. Pre-cast cement and faïence, dimensions unknown. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 77 M. Quail. *Versorging*, 1932. Pre-cast cement and faïence, dimensions unknown. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 78 M. Quail. *Die Vrug*. 1932. Pre-cast cement and faïence, dimensions unknown. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 79 M. Quail. (Clockwise from left) *Industry*, *Export*, *Agriculture*, and *Sport*. 1932. Pre-cast cement, dimensions unknown. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 80 SANTAM Advertisement, *Die Huisgenoot*, 30 June 1933. Advertisements in the popular Afrikaans press proudly featured an image of the 'skyscraper', as well as an image of the 'agriculture' motif. In this way the company could be seen to appeal both to the conservative as well as the progressive factions of its constituency by engaging imagery that evoked a sense of the Afrikaner take his 'rightful place' in the fast-paced world of commerce, while recognising that his political and cultural identity was irrevocably linked with the land. (Source: *Die Huisgenoot*, 30 June 1933: 50)

Figure 81 M. Quail. *Prosperity*. 1932. Pre-cast cement, dimensions unknown. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 82 Louw and Louw. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg). 1932. Burg Street façade showing the placement of the low-relief bronze panels by M. Quail.

Figure 83 M. Quail. *Indigenous South African Flora.* 1932. Bronze, dimensions unknown. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 84 M. Quail. *Indigenous South African Flora.* 1932. Bronze, dimensions unknown. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg) (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 85 M. Quail, *Indigenous South African Fauna and Flora*, 1932. Bronze, dimensions variable. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 86 M. Quail. *Zulus*. 1932. Bronze, dimensions unknown. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 87 M. Quail. *Bushmen.* 1932. Bronze, dimensions unknown. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town.

Figure 88 Louw and Louw. SANTAM/SANLAM Building (now Waalburg), Cape Town. 1932. Detail of the ceiling of the vestibule showing giant protea buds.

Figure 89 W. H. Grant. Commercial Union Building (now Market House), Cape Town. 1932.

Figure 90 W. H. Grant. Commercial Union Building (now Market House), Cape Town. 1932. In keeping with Art Deco's interest in 'primitive' and exotic sources, the elaborately-decorated parapets at the top storeys of the Commercial Union Building are reminiscent of Aztec designs.

Figure 91 W. H. Grant. Commercial Union Building (now Market House), Cape Town. 1932. The continuous frieze of stylised proteas are an ambiguous regional reference.

Figure 92 W. H. Grant. Commercial Union Building (now Market House), Cape Town. 1932.

Figure 93 W. H. Grant. Commercial Union Building (now Market House), Cape Town. 1932.

Figure 94 Lewis A. Simon. American eagle motif on the façade of the Church Street Post Office, New York. 1935. The Church Street Post Office and Federal Building was designed under the watch of Lewis A. Simon, supervising architect of the Treasury under Roosevelt's New Deal administration from 1933 to 1939. Situated adjacent to the World Trade Centre site, the building suffered considerable damage during the September 11th 2001 attack.

Figure 95 F. M. Glennie and Louw and Louw. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town. 1940.

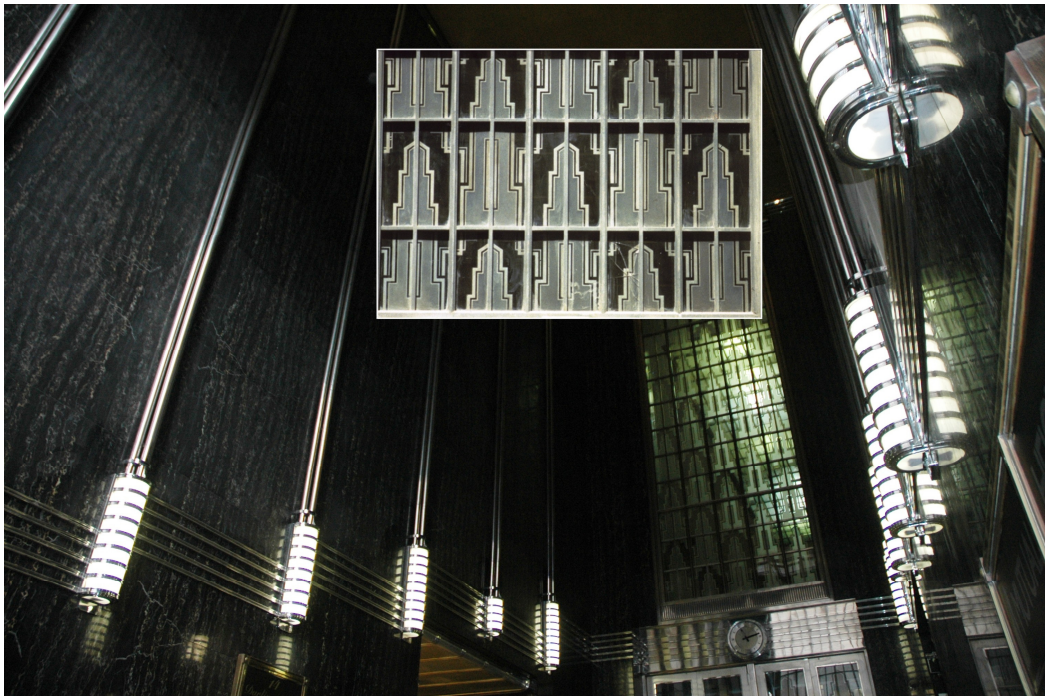

Figure 96 F. M. Glennie and Louw and Louw. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town. 1940. The foyer of the Old Mutual Building, in which no expense was spared in terms of the finishes or attention to detail. The walls are lined with gold-veined black marble, and the ceilings with gold leaf. The elaborate chrome light fittings are treated as pilasters, with chrome accents being continued onto the door frames and elsewhere. The windows in the foyer, as well as all the interior windows throughout the building, have the shape of the skyscraper sandblasted on to them (inset).

Figure 97 F. M. Glennie and Louw and Louw. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town. 1940.

Figure 98 F. M. Glennie and Louw and Louw. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town. 1940. Mitford-Barberton's carved granite frieze continues on all three façades of the building. This section, to the left of the main entrance, depicts the Landing of Jan van Riebeeck, while that to the right depicts the 1820 Settlers. This conforms to the convention, established early in the decade, of showing the origins of the 'two' (white) races of South Africa as having an equally important impact on its history.

Figure 99 Ivan Mitford-Barberton. *1820 Settlers.* 1940. Carved granite. Old Mutual Building, Cape Town.

Figure 100 Ivan Mitford-Barberton. 'Tribal types' of the Southern African subcontinent. 1940. Carved granite. Old Mutual Building, Cape Town. The references to 'Africa' are most obviously – and problematically – stated in the Old Mutual Building in the nine gigantic sculpted heads denoting the tribal 'types' of the subcontinent.

Figure 101 Ivan Mitford-Barberton. 'Tribal types' of the Southern African subcontinent (composite photograph). 1940. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town. Carved granite.

Figure 102 Ivan Mitford-Barberton. *Native Mask*. 1940. Carved granite. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 103 Ivan Mitford-Barberton. *Baboon*. 1940. Carved granite. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town

Figure 104 Ivan Mitford-Barberton. *Nongkause* (detail). 1940. Carved granite. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 105 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. Fresco programme in the Assembly Hall of the Old Mutual Building. 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 106 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Great Trek*. 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 107 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Pioneer Mining* (left) and *Pioneer Agriculture* (right). 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 108 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Modern Industry*. 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 109 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Agricultural Industry in the Western Cape*. 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 110 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Agricultural Industry in the Western Cape* (detail). 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 111 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Pioneer Mining* (detail). 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 112 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Modern Industry* (detail). 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 113 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Pioneer Agriculture* (detail). 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town. In the context of the 1930s the mythologising of a united South Africa inevitably plays itself out in terms of a privileged white oligarchy over the anonymous, disenfranchised black masses. In these terms, the 'native races' are marginalised and silenced by the crushing sophisms of colonialism that construct them at best as the exotic, primitive other, and at worst simply as an anonymous resource to be exploited. This is made abundantly clear in this detail from the 'Pioneer Agriculture fresco, where black workers are depicted as anonymous, generalised 'beasts of burden', while white people are invariably presented as recognisable individuals.

Figure 114 Le Roux Smith Le Roux. *Modern Industry* (detail). 1940. Egg tempera on plaster, dimensions variable. Old Mutual Building (now Mutual Heights), Cape Town.

Figure 115 Herbert Baker. Union Buildings, Pretoria. 1910 – 1913. Designed by Baker – the undisputed if unofficial architect laureate of the British Empire – to house the government of the newly constituted Union of South Africa, the Union Buildings in Pretoria were not only an elaborate monument to the ideals of imperialism, but also expressed, in the twin domes, the union of the 'two' races of South Africa – that is, the English and the Afrikaners. The indigenous black population was all but ignored. The new South African flag reminds us that the Union Buildings still function as the seat of the ANC-led government, and as such are a continued reminder of the fact that usage, not intention, ultimately determines meaning in public buildings.

Figure 116 Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects. The Northern Cape Legislature viewed from the south, Kimberley. 2000 – 03. The winning entrant in a competition initiated by the Northern Cape provincial government in 1997, the Northern Cape Legislature is located four kilometres to the west of the predominantly white, colonial-era diamond mining town of Kimberley and immediately adjacent to the predominantly black, low-income township of Galeshewe. As such, it aims to reinvent the odious notion of the apartheid-era 'buffer zone' as a symbolically-invested space linking black and white, old and new.

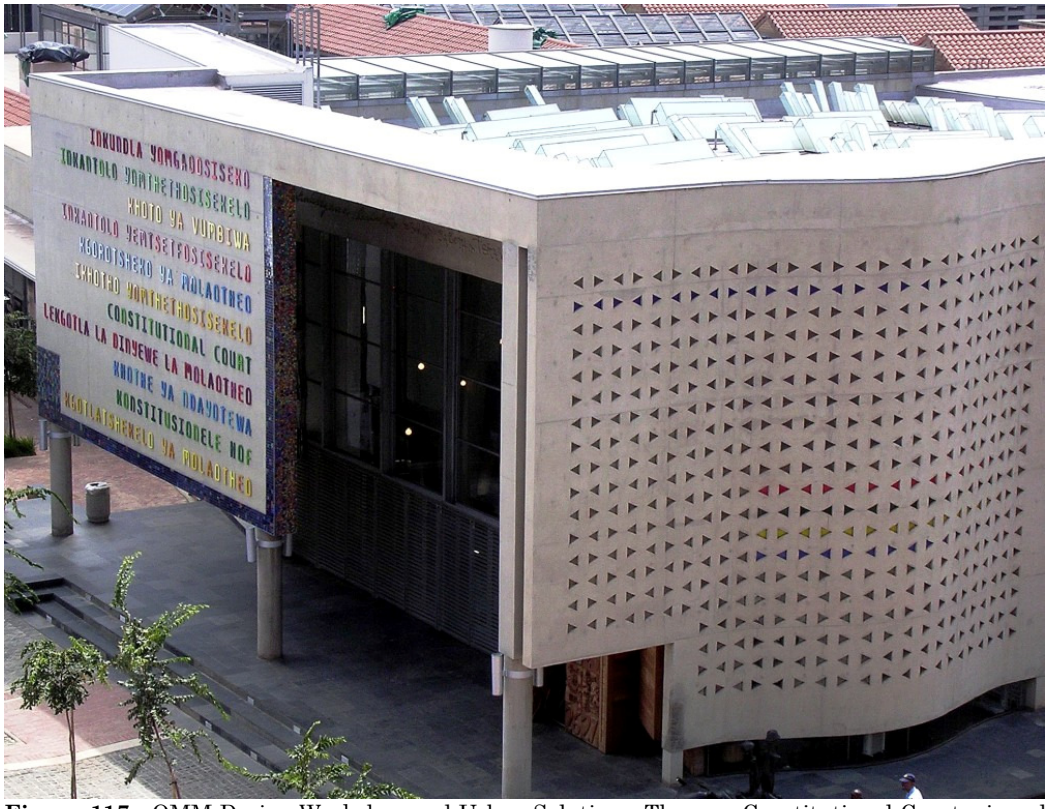

Figure 117 OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. The new Constitutional Court, viewed from the south, Johannesburg. 2001 – 04. Built on the site of, and incorporating into its precinct sections of, Johannesburg's infamous fort and 'native prison', the new Constitutional Court is at once a complex of working buildings, a heritage site, and a community centre. As such, it is a concrete symbol of the notion of redemptive over repressive justice, that is at the heart of South Africa's democratic constitution.

Figure 118 Luis Ferriera da Silva Architects. The Northern Cape Legislature viewed from the south, Kimberley, South Africa. 2000 – 03. Like Le Corbusier's government buildings at Chandigarh – which it in some ways resembles – the Northern Cape Legislature attempts to create a balance between noteworthy modernity and a sense of regionalism. Notwithstanding the tensions and contradictions implicit in this ambitious aim, the complex certainly makes an impressive statement on an urban landscape, perhaps better known for its lack of architecture – the Big Hole (see figure 119 below) – than its presence. This view, which confronts the visitor on entering the complex, shows the tower (left), the Assembly building (centre), and the Premier's building (right) set behind a 'people's square', the *kgotla*, or gathering place. In this way the symbolic, legislative, and bureaucratic functions of government are, in the best traditions of civic architecture, presented in a grand gesture as an integrated an aestheticised whole.

Figure 119 The Big Hole, Kimberley. Photographed January 2005. Viewed against the backdrop of the city that it effectively spawned, the 'Big Hole' is probably Kimberley's most enduring landmark. 1.5 km in circumference and approximately 365 m deep, the Big Hole was at the centre of the richest diamond-yielding mine in the world until it closed in 1915.

Figure 120 Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects. The Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2000 – 03. An essay in carefully considered postmodern formalism, the complex is characterised by sweeping curves and organic shapes, coloured and textured to blend with the dour surrounding landscape. In keeping with the competition brief that the Legislature building should reflect both the natural and social diversity of the Northern Cape, various decorative and structural elements that evoke a sense of the landscape and the unusual flora of the region, have been incorporated as monumental coding devices in the building.

Figure 121 Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects. The Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2000 – 03.

Figure 122 Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects. The Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2000 – 03. The construction of a regionalist aesthetic is nowhere more obviously stated than in the *mesembryanthemum*-shaped benches placed under the pilotis of the administration block.

Figure 123 Kate Otten Architects. The African Craft Market, Rosebank, Johannesburg. 2000. An egregious example of pseudo-regionalism in Johannesburg, the African Craft Market, situated adjacent to an upmarket shopping mall, constructs a commercially-inspired fantasy of Africa that has very little to do with its literal African context.

Figure 124 Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects. The Premier's Building, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2000 – 03. The 'wings' that flank the entrance to the Premier's Building were modelled on a photograph of the be-robed Premier raising his arms in welcome. Thus the populace is entreated to yield to the embrace of a beneficent government.

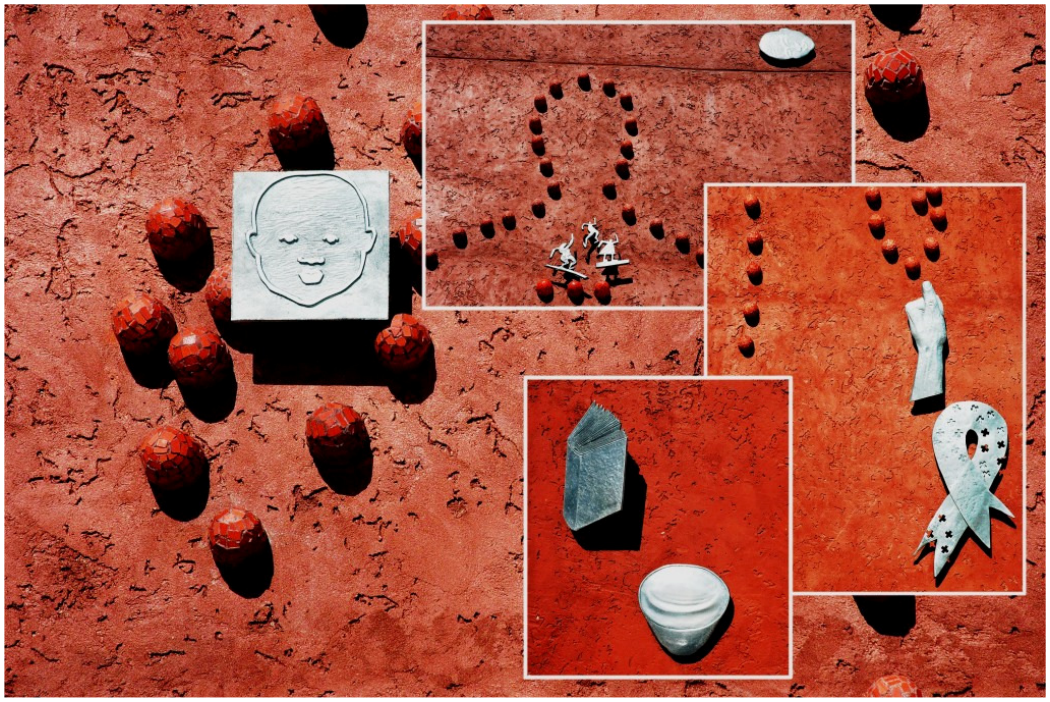

Figure 125 Clive van den Berg. **L**ow-relief sculptures on the façade of the Premier's Building, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley (detail). 2003. Cast aluminium. Dimensions variable. In addition to engaging the conventional clichés of public art – the image of the child symbolising hope for the future; 'moral regeneration' symbolised by the Bible (inset bottom) – the cast aluminium cut-outs on the façade of the Premier's Building also represent various aspects of the province and its history, as well as acknowledging pressing social issues like AIDS (inset centre) and the infamous 'bucket system' which many impoverished rural communities are forced to use in the absence of running water (inset bottom).

Figure 126 Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects. The Tower viewed from the south, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2000 – 03. The focal point around which the plan of the Legislature complex revolves, the Tower fulfils no practical function other than housing public lavatories and providing a balcony from which the Premier – savage extremes of weather permitting – can address the populace assembled in the plaza, or *kgotla* ('gathering place') as it is styled, below.

Figure 127 and Figure 128 (below) Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects. The Tower viewed from the east, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2000 – 03. As the symbolic centrepiece of the Legislature complex, the Tower is the obvious location for mosaic portrait medallions (figure 128 below) of past and present presidents Nelson Mandela (centre) and Thabo Mbeki (left), along with a blank medallion recognising the changing face of leadership in a democracy (right).

Figure 128 Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). Portrait medallions of President Thabo Mbeki and former President Nelson Mandela (detail), The Tower, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Mosaic and sheet metal. Dimensions variable.

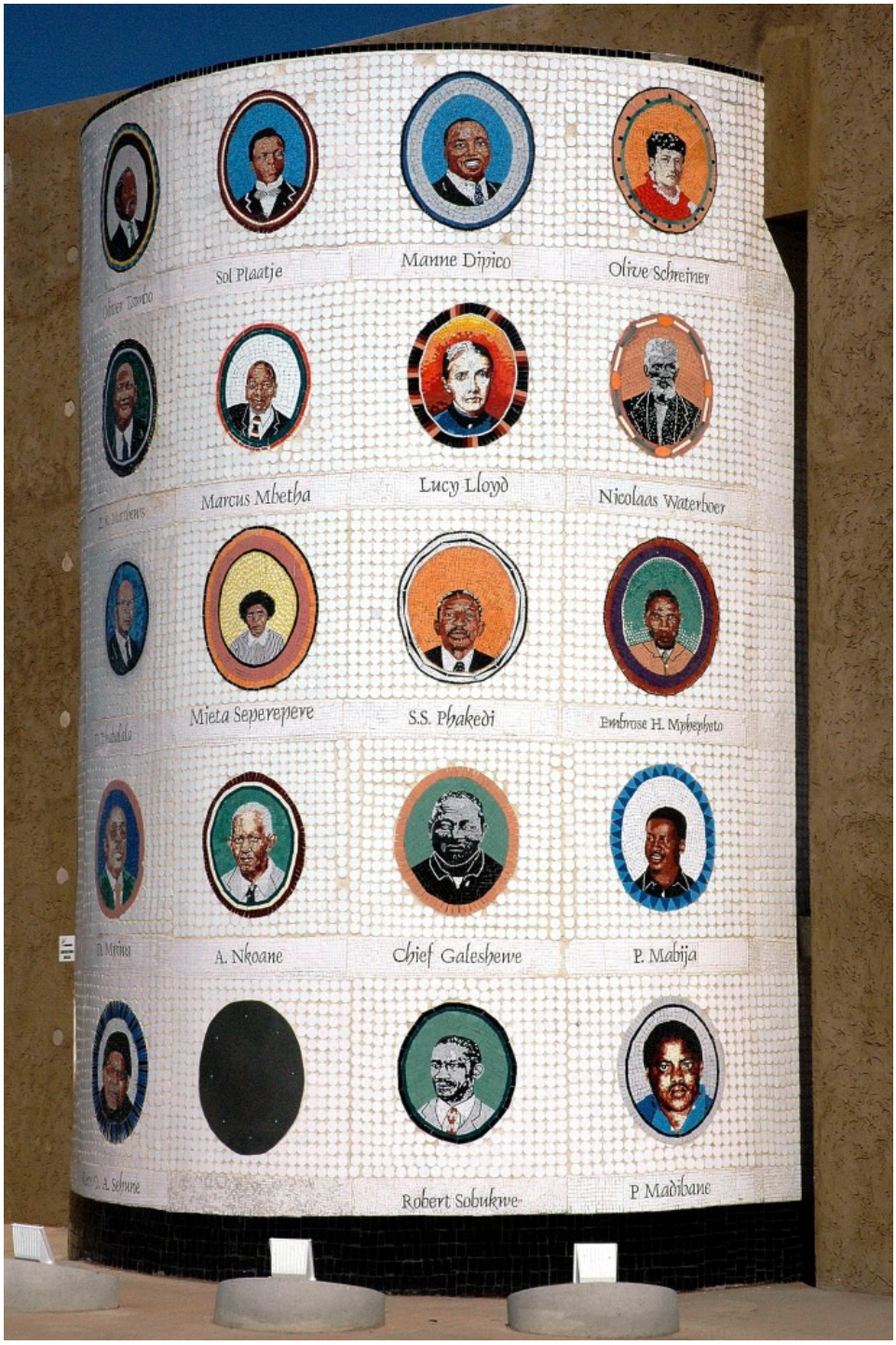

Figure 129 and Figure 130 (below) Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). The Heroes' Wall, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley South Africa. 2003. Mosaic and sheet metal. Dimensions variable. The Heroes' wall, projecting from the east façade of the Members' Building, pays tribute, in a series of mosaic portrait medallions, to regional and national heroes (excluded or occluded by apartheid-era histories) of the liberation struggle.

Figure 130 Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). The Heroes' Wall, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley South Africa. 2003. Mosaic and sheet metal. Dimensions variable.

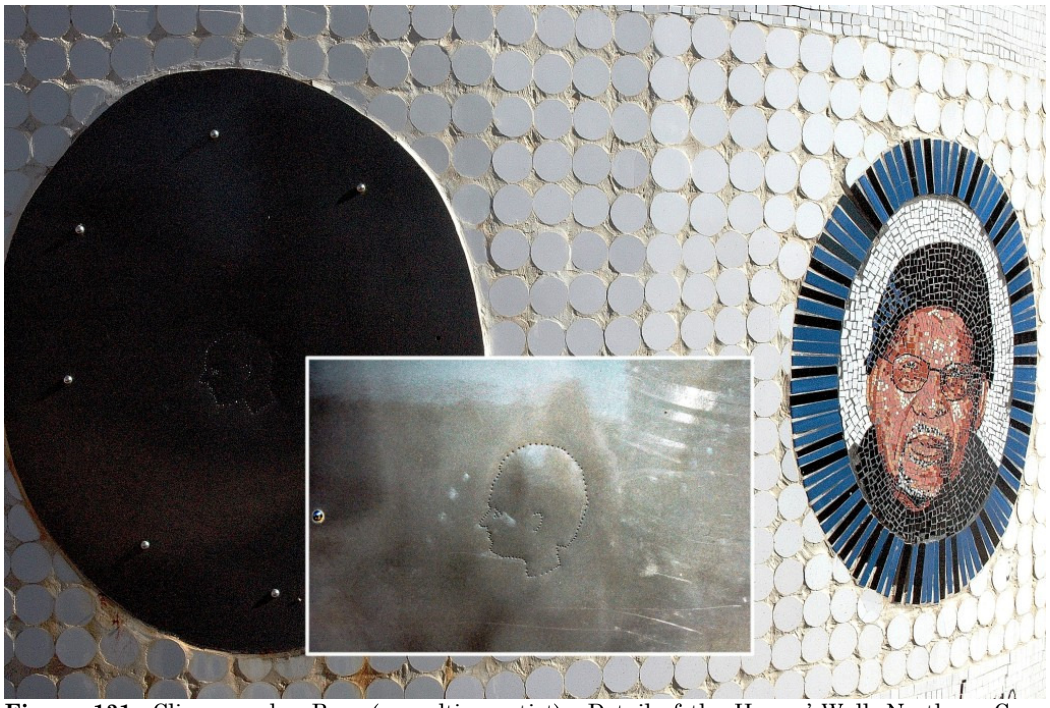

Figure 131 Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). Detail of the Heroes' Wall, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Mosaic and sheet metal. Dimensions variable. Anonymous, ghost-like profiles pricked out on empty medallions (inset) on the Heroes' Wall presage future heroes, while also recognising – in the tradition of the 'unknown soldier' – the contribution of ordinary, unnamed citizens.

Figure 132 Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects and Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). The perimeter fence, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Steel. Dimensions variable. Despite the best intentions to create an accessible and welcoming environment, security issues nonetheless necessitated the erection of a sturdy and well-illuminated perimeter fence. Militating somewhat against the implied denial of access, stylised heads representing the populace of the region, are mounted at regular intervals along this fence and its lamp posts (inset).

Figure 133, Figure 134 (below) and Figure 135 (below) Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). Concrete heads, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Concrete and mosaic. Dimensions variable. Amplifying the theme suggested by the cut-out heads on the perimeter fence, large concrete heads in profile, some decorated with mosaics and others with high- or low-relief elements (figure 135 insets) are scattered randomly throughout the indigenous gardens. Collective symbols of the various peoples of the region, these heads reiterate notions of accessibility and a people-centred government.

Figure 134 Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). Concrete head, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Concrete and mosaic. Dimensions variable.

Figure 135 Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). Concrete heads, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Concrete and mosaic. Dimensions variable.

Figure 136 Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). Mosaic figures on either side of the entrance to the Assembly Hall, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Mosaic. 150cm x 300cm. Outside the Assembly Hall, two mosaics depict archetypal 'citizens', one male, one female, holding scrolls emblazoned with the dicta of the Constitution. The male figure (figure 135) holds up a model of the building, once again reiterating the symbolic link between citizenry and government, as exemplified by the new buildings.

Figure 137 Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). Mosaic figure on left-hand side of the entrance to the Assembly Hall, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Mosaic. 150cm x 300cm.

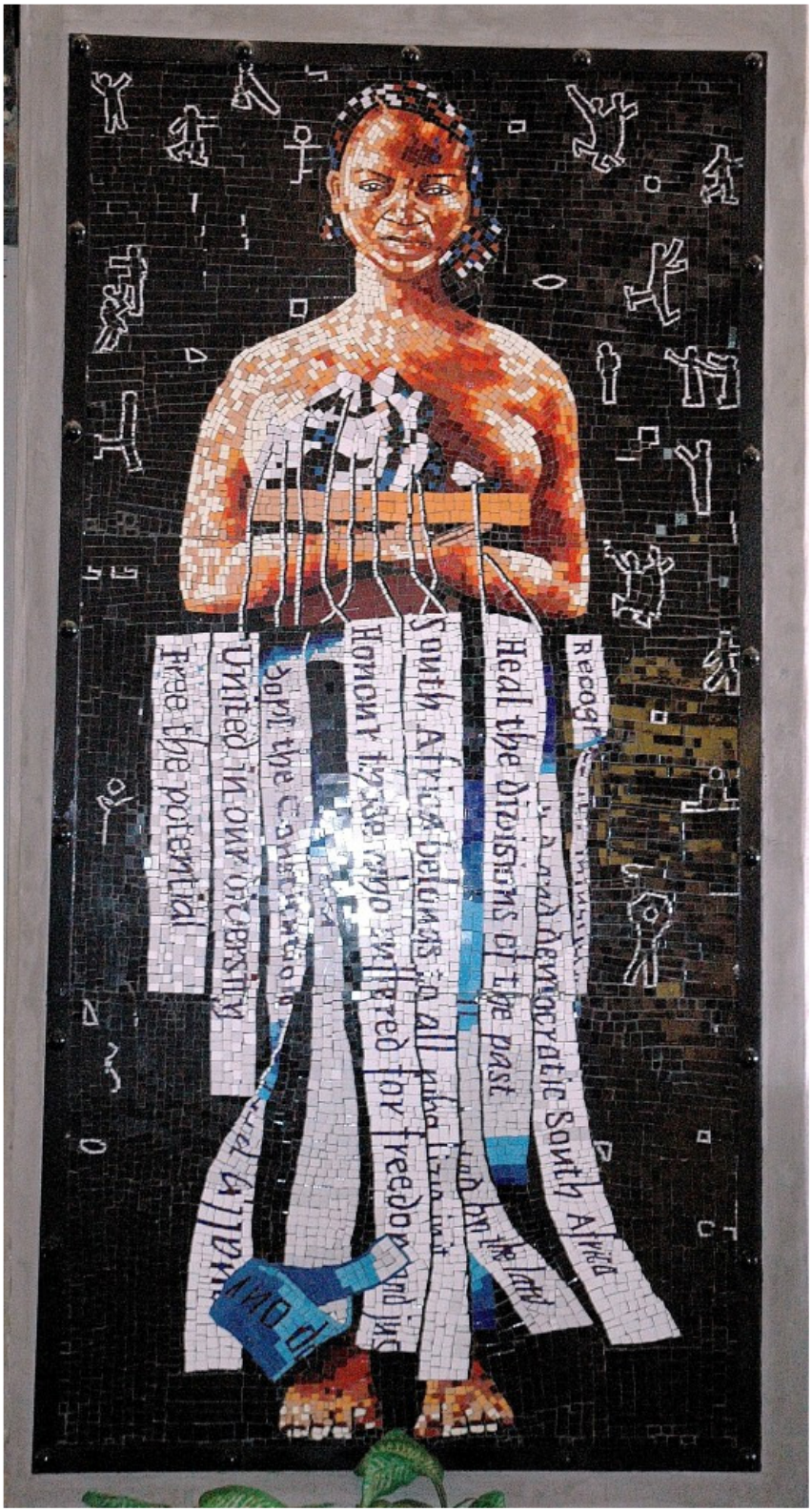

Figure 138 Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). Mosaic figure on the right-hand side of the entrance to the Assembly Hall, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Mosaic. 150cm x 300cm.

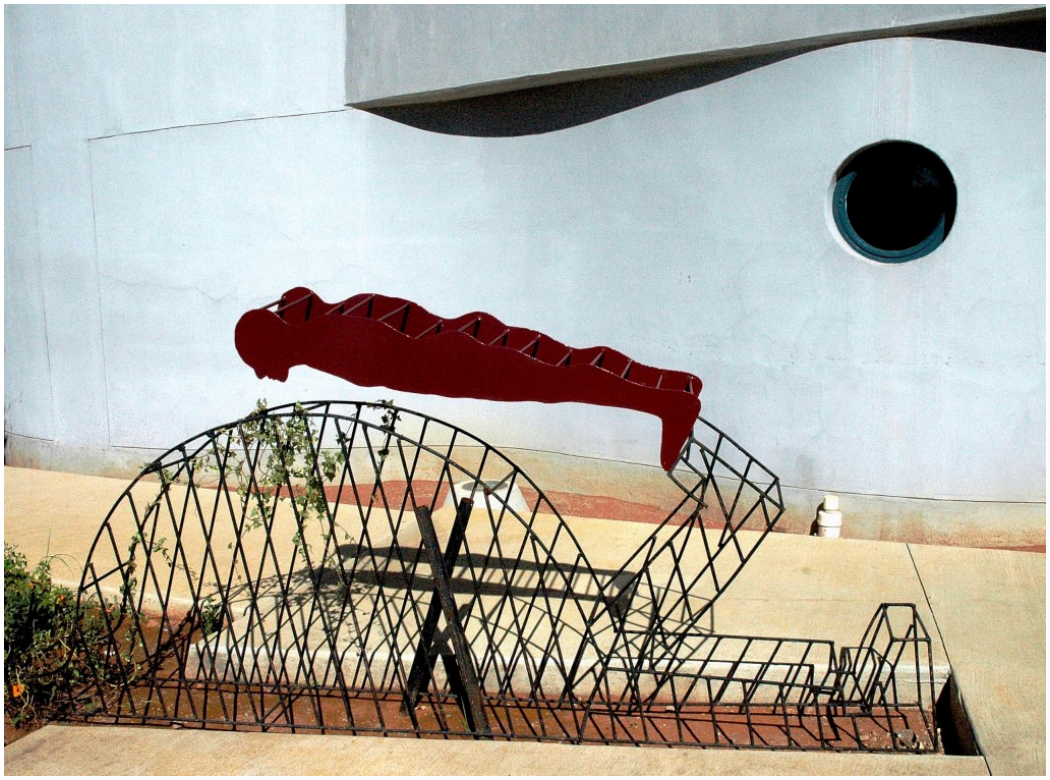

Figure 139 and Figure 140 (below) Clive van den Berg. Sculptural topiary armatures, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley, South Africa. 2003. Steel. Dimensions variable. Topiaries-in-progress, placed in the indigenous garden separating the two sections of the Premier's Building, add a note of whimsical theatricality to the complex.

Figure 140 Clive van den Berg. Sculptural topiary armatures, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Steel and mosaic. Dimensions variable.

Figure 141 Clive van den Berg (consulting artist). Mosaic representing Kimberley, Northern Cape Legislature, Kimberley. 2003. Mosaic. Dimensions variable. The ramp leading to the administrative section of the Premier's Building is decorated with a mural depicting Kimberley past and present. In addition to the obvious reference to the Big Hole (inset), the township of Galeshewe – marginalised by apartheid-era histories – is given prominence.

Figure 142 Norman Foster. Extensions to the Reichstag, Berlin. 2001. In keeping with Foster's injunction that the new German parliament buildings in Berlin "should not keep any secrets" (Foster 2001), the notion of 'transparency' is engaged as one of the guiding structural and symbolic principles in the design. Here, glass walls outside the Administration Block are inscribed with the articles of the German Constitution.

Figure 143 OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. The Constitutional Court, Johannesburg. 2001 – 04. Built on the site of, and incorporating into its precinct, Johannesburg's infamous fort and 'native prison', the Constitutional Court project, like Berlin's Reichstag (figure 142 above), recognizes that architectural history can be manipulated to suit shifting ideologies. Also like the Reichstag, this is engaged structurally partly through a metaphor of 'transparency' – large expanses of glass provide glimpses of the inner workings of the building – as well through the metaphor of 'rebuilding': sections of the original buildings have been incorporated into the new structures, while red bricks salvaged from the demolished Awaiting-Trial Prison have been used to construct the 'Great African Steps' (figure 144 below).

Figure 144 OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. The 'Great African Steps,' Constitutional Court, Johannesburg. 2001 – 04.

Figure 145 OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. The entrance doors to the Constitutional Court, Johannesburg. 2001 – 04. The eight metre high entrance doors bear the carved numbers one to twenty seven and carvings in sign languages (see detail, figure 146 below) of each of the twenty seven basic human rights enshrined in the constitution.

Figure 146 OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. Detail of the carving on the entrance doors to the Constitutional Court, Johannesburg. 2001 – 04. The carvers' names are included with the carvings in sign language of the twenty seven human rights enshrined in the constitution.

Figure 147 OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. The Constitutional Court viewed from the east, Johannesburg. 2001 – 04. The references to the local – *i.e.* the 'African'– are implied rather than explicitly stated, and carry strong symbolic associations. Most significant amongst these is the stylised tree that informs both the design of the court's logo, seen here on a balcony on the east façade (and inset detail) – as well as aspects of the structure itself (see figures 148 – 150 below). This is based on a somewhat generalised interpretation of the Southern African tradition of dispensing justice from beneath a tree, but has nonetheless become one of the most potent signifiers of place.

Figure 148 OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. The foyer of the Constitutional Court, Johannesburg. 2001 – 04. A 'forest' of angled piers in the entrance hall reiterates the idea, first suggested in the logo of the African tradition of dispensing justice from beneath a tree, with their shaded green and brown mosaic cladding evoking a sense of bark and foliage (detail, figure 149 below). The wire chandeliers by artist South African artist Walter Oltmann are fashioned to resemble leaves.

Figure 149 OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. Detail of the angled piers in the foyer of the Constitutional Court, Johannesburg. 2001 – 04. The shaded green and brown mosaic cladding of the angled piers in the foyer evokes a sense of bark and foliage, and thus reinforces the 'African' notion of justice being dispensed from beneath a tree. The use of mosaic, however, is not entirely unproblematic: Judging both by the Constitutional Court and the Northern Cape Legislature, as well as by a plethora of recent commercial buildings throughout South Africa, mosaic seems lately to have become a signifier of 'Africa'. This is of course patent nonsense if one is concerned with 'authentic' notions of regional materials and techniques – mosaic, after all, is not a 'traditional' decorative technique anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa. It seems to me rather that mosaic, in addition to its pleasing decorative qualities, represents also to the first world sensibility the notion of the 'hand made' or 'craft' and has thus, by some uneasy logic, comes to represent 'Africa'.

Figure 150 OMM Design Workshop and Urban Solutions. Wooden stools in the foyer of the Constitutional Court, Johannesburg. 2001 – 04. Stools fashioned from tree stumps complete the effect of a 'forest', and thus reiterate the notion of the 'African' tradition of justice being dispensed from beneath a tree.

Figure 151 The more things change …? By aiming at inclusivity and a broad but nationalistically focused appeal public building in democratic South Africa unwittingly adopt tactics similar to those employed by the ideologues of the 'fusion' politics of the 1930s. Thus, while the accent may have changed, the language remains the same: Here (reading clockwise from top left) are the same stereotyped notions of peace and prosperity (although brought up to date); the same unctuously virtuous citizens treating political rhetoric as Holy Writ; the same identification of indigenous 'types'; the same constructions of an heroic past. In effect, this constitutes the use of the same implicit language of 'us' and an undefined but inevitable 'them'. In the final analysis the lessons of the 1930s are clear: assumptions about cultural identity, no matter how inclusive, are never neutral, and imagined communities – and their representation in the visual arts – are never permanent.